

# THE LIFE-BUILDERS

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ELIZABETH DEJEANS



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HE DREW HER TOWARD HIM AND—WITH AN INARTICULATE  
WORD ABOUT THE MORROW—WAS GONE

# THE LIFE-BUILDERS

A NOVEL

BY  
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"THE HOUSE OF THANE"



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THE LIFE-BUILDERS

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## CHAPTER I

ALYTH'S thoughts ran on regardless of the disjointed conversation about him. He and those at table with him were the products of much the same environment; they were all of the Middle West, that fertile producer of virile men and women, outgrowth of its rich soil, one with the miles of waving wheat, the river-bottoms' rank output of corn, the sweet-scented fields of timothy and clover—and the capable schoolhouses with windows looking east and west, tempting the spirit of youth to the beyond. Brain and brawn and energy a-plenty it produced, that great Middle West, and in spite of—or was it possibly because of?—its solidly material prosperity.

The windows above the terraces into which his host had fashioned the hillside were thrown wide to catch what breeze there might be, affording a far view of Turawa Valley. Below, in the near distance, was the river with an arm circling the town of New Rome, and beyond, on the flats, was its grimy foster-child, Rolling-Mill City, straight streets of cottages for the housing of mill-hands. There was also the collection of smoke-stacks, furnace-sheds, piles of slag, all blue-hazed by smoke, and even in the daylight flecked by tongues of flame, the hot belchings from furnace doors. Beyond the panting activity of the mills were quiet stretches of wheat-land, bearing a crop of

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stubble, and circling all the wooded hills whose conelike crowns Alyth knew better than he knew the mining engineer's alphabet. It was Illinois in midsummer.

How well he knew it all! Alyth's keen sight could distinguish close to the court-house square the patch of gray with a red roof that had been his home when he wore pinafores. A village New Rome had been then, and now it numbered not more than ten thousand souls; the activities of Mill City had added but a few thousand to its population. Yet, for the Middle West, New Rome was an ancient institution; it was much older than Chicago. New Rome had been founded by pioneers who had done strange things to the Indians, by Puritans from New England, and later by Pennsylvania Dutch. It also had its foreign colony—Alsations, who still spoke German and French.

Alyth's thoughts were somewhat suddenly focused, for the girl who sat beside him had turned to him.

"You are looking at New Rome. . . . I have been thinking that we are most of us, like the old German women down there, simply putting together a patchwork quilt. We accumulate experiences—sometimes a number of them—scarcely glancing at them. Then again we acquire them one by one—bits of color whose history we don't forget. Then by and by, when there appears to be only retrospect left, we begin to piece them together and see the whole, one's life laid out like a pattern. . . . It is a little like that, is it not, Mr. Alyth?"

"With some of us, certainly," Alyth agreed.

He studied her a moment. Her fanciful remark had fitted in oddly with his silent observations of the Milenberg family. They were six at table—James Milenberg, her father, keenly appraising as usual; Mrs. Milenberg, whose steady trickle of conversation had required only a modicum of Alyth's attention; Karl Janniss, the artist, whose ill-concealed interest in Myra Milenberg's every move-



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ment Alyth had noticed, and, beside her, Justin St. Claire. St. Claire was certainly offering the girl a bright bit of color with the dark lining well concealed. Did she mean to take it, and by and by would she painfully stitch it into place, Alyth wondered? He had been wondering ever since he had met her, so her remark seemed oddly timed—a bit of thought-transference.

Alyth understood perfectly. The family interest centered in St. Claire's courtship of the daughter; he and Karl Janniss had no part in it. Janniss had been summoned from New York to paint Milenberg's portrait; like Alyth, he had only a business connection with the millionaire, and was meeting his wife and daughter for the first time. Alyth knew that Milenberg's interest in him had ceased at the moment when, his expert opinion on Milenberg's Nevada mine delivered, their party was free to speed eastward. They had stopped in Illinois, at Milenberg's home—one of his homes—St. Claire evidently for urgent reasons of his own, and Alyth because Milenberg's invitation had included him, tempting him too strongly to see again the town where, some thirty-one years before, he had been born.

Both Mrs. Milenberg and her husband had originated in New Rome, and in her gentle way, gentle in spite of her Middle West voice and occasional lapses in grammar, she was impressing the fact upon Alyth, a sort of minor accompaniment to his thoughts:

"I knew your mother well—we grew up here together," she was saying. "The moment Mr. Milenberg introduced you I knew you must be Kitty Alyth's son. You have her eyes. I remember when you were born—it was the same day I married Mr. Milenberg." She glanced across the table at her husband, an almost imperceptible pause caused by a tightening of the lips. Then she continued in her pleasant, ordinary way: "I had three children before Myra came, so when she was a baby you

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were a big boy of eleven. We left New Rome then—Mr. Milenberg had gone into business in Chicago—but I always kept up my friendship with your mother.”

“I suppose I saw you more than once when I was a boy,” Alyth said, “but I don’t remember you—a boy’s recollections are odd, disjointed things, usually, with emphasis laid on much that is trivial.”

“I have always known about you, though, and I’ve met your father-in law, Mr. Baker. Mr. Milenberg says he is the best manager the mills ever had, and a good business man. So, you see, I’ve heard all about your marriage.” She was smiling at him, and in her smile there was a faint reminder of her daughter, the only likeness Alyth had as yet discovered.

“Yes,” he assented, tonelessly. Alyth knew that his marriage was treasured as one of the romances of New Rome.

“Since Mr. Milenberg built this house I come here a lot, for of course, now that he has become such a big business man and is going from one end of the country to the other all the time, I can’t follow him about. We have just as big a house as this in Chicago, but I like it better here because my friends are here. Then the last four years Myra has been away so much at school in New York, or abroad, so it’s left me a good deal alone.” When she spoke of her husband the smile left her face, and now there was wistfulness in her voice. “I often wish, though, that this house was not so big and such a care. I’d much rather live down there in New Rome in the old house my father left me—” She caught herself up, her faded cheeks reddening uncomfortably. “It’s just that the—that the old house is more home, somehow.”

“I know,” Alyth said, helping her out. “You are attached to your old home. It is not easy to feel an affection for a recent structure, however imposing it may be.”



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"Yes," she assented, a little hastily, "that is what I mean."

But Alyth knew that it was not all her meaning. She was pathetic, he thought. She was so ordinary an example of the unprogressive of the generation preceding his own. Alyth had had cause to wonder endlessly over that type of woman. Each generation appeared to have its particular manifestation of the feminine unchangeable, the woman whom her husband outgrows, one of the apparently inevitable tragedies of marriage. Alyth knew—as who did not who knew James Milenberg well—that this colorless woman must long ago have become a mere appendage to her forceful husband. She had evidently faded early. She was certainly not older than her husband, yet at fifty he was alert, keen-eyed, virile; not a tall man—under medium height, rather, but wiry. His aquiline face was lined, yet the lines had not the suggestion of his wife's wrinkles. Both her face and figure had the down-drawn look of weakened muscles so frequently seen in the middle-aged woman of the generation preceding her own. Still, her somewhat sunken eyes were pleasant. They were brown and steadfast, the eyes of a good and patient though not very intelligent woman. Alyth liked her in spite of the fact that her conversation did not ruffle even the surface of his thoughts.

It was the daughter who interested Alyth. The moment he had seen her meeting with St. Claire he had recognized the immense attraction the man must have for her. Most women were attracted by Justin St. Claire, and Myra Milenberg's type would be irresistibly drawn. The child of such typically *nouveau riche* parents would naturally be passionately admiring of culture and family position of long standing. The girl's entire manner and her carefully chosen Anglo-New-York speech showed her bias. She had a clear-enough understanding of her father's unscrupulous methods and her mother's short-

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comings. Marriage with St. Claire would give her the things she craved, for though a Middle-Westerner like herself, St. Claire was the product of generations of culture. He was a native of St. Louis, a city that has always been more Southern than Western, and that boasts a history. He was of French descent, his family being one of the oldest in Missouri.

And the man had, in addition, a fascinating personality. He was courtly in manner, quick-witted, genially shrewd, politic to the last degree. His acute legal mind, combined with his popular qualities, had made Justin St. Claire a power in his city, and had brought him into high favor with the ruling administration. He was also extraordinarily good-looking. Though forty-one, he was still slender, as noticeable for his height, soldierly carriage, and well-shaped head as for his very regular features and brilliant eyes. With a mustache twisted above his warm-lipped mouth, and a slight exaggeration in dress, he would look thoroughly the Frenchman. Clean-shaven, and in incisive business attire, he looked what he was, a strikingly handsome American gentleman, a lawyer of the new order—a lawyer-financier.

Alyth knew Justin St. Claire exceedingly well. Early in his career as mining engineer he had come in touch with the lawyer, and in late years, since George Alyth had begun to rank as one of the best mining experts in the country, his path and St. Claire's had frequently crossed. Alyth had lived through an aging experience on the New York stock-market, a venture in which St. Claire had also been involved. He had seen St. Claire rubbed clean of veneer. He had discovered that Justin St. Claire had the craving of the gambler, that he was a taker of long chances.

Alyth also had a back-stairs acquaintance with a side of St. Claire that very few knew. Every one knew that St. Claire's wife had been insane for years, and that

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during her life St. Claire had apparently adapted himself in a dignified manner to his misfortune, and that after her death he had continued in his evenly adjusted way. Scandal had never touched him; with the principles he advocated, an entanglement would have been somewhat disastrous.

But Alyth knew more than most, so this attitude of the determined suitor was something of a shock to him. Every look St. Claire bent upon Myra Milenberg was an avowal. He was the impetuous lover, a part that Alyth knew was at one time quite natural to him. Was it now, Alyth wondered? . . . Or did Milenberg's certain backing of his financial ambitions, should he become his son-in-law, tempt him? And St. Claire's political and social influence would be helpful to Milenberg.

Milenberg would forward the match, and St. Claire would also have an advocate in Mrs. Milenberg. To marry her daughter to Justin St. Calire would appear a great good fortune; St. Claire was so impeccable.

Alyth was glad that the dinner was nearing a close, for he had discovered that under her monotonous exterior Mrs. Milenberg was nervous. She had been making a great effort to entertain him, introducing in her haphazard fashion one subject after the other. Alyth had a shrewd guess that Milenberg had ordered his wife to take charge of him while he monopolized Janniss; he wanted St. Claire given a clear field with his daughter.

Mrs. Milenberg was talking now of the old-fashioned garden that Alyth had noticed on the lower terrace. "If Mr. Milenberg puts a fountain where he has planned, I'm afraid my garden will have to go," she complained. "Still, a fountain will look very fine there."

Alyth was unexpectedly interested, though, except for the slight lifting of his brows that made his blue glance vivid, he looked as he had throughout the meal, courteous but unsmiling. "So *you* are responsible for that



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beautiful garden! I thought possibly it was your daughter."

"No; I planted almost everything that's there."

"It is the most beautiful thing about the place," Alyth declared. "I noticed it at once. I hope you will take me down to see it after dinner."

Mrs. Milenberg flushed with pleasure. Evidently she was unused to appreciation. "We are all going down after dinner. You like gardening, then?"

"I do. My garden is one of my few satisfactions. It is my friend in time of need. If there is any better way of working off irritation, I want to be shown it. If every man spent an hour in his garden digging, before he took the lid off his boiling feelings, there would be fewer explosions."

"But how do you manage to have a garden in the city?" she asked.

"I live in the suburbs—in Manor Park Place. Every one who lives in New York lives out of it—unless he is so favored of fortune that, like Mr. Milenberg, he can have several homes."

The down-drawn lines returned to her face. "One home and a family kept together is the best."

"That's true enough," he returned, with quiet emphasis.

He looked away from her as he spoke, off at the roofs and spires of New Rome, and she studied him in her unobtrusive way. Ordinarily his look was cold, as if he were in the habit of commenting inwardly on the things he saw, and few things pleased him. He looked so clever that she had been afraid of him. But when he spoke of the garden she rather liked him; his eyes had a way of smiling without asking leave of his other features. She remembered his father well, a rough-hewn, sandy Scotchman with smileless lips. This man was very like his father only he was leaner and taller and darker. He

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had his mother's black hair and blue eyes with thick lashes. The father had always been considered a hard man, given to a humor that was two-edged. But the mother, her girlhood friend, had been a black-haired, blue-eyed woman of dreams and smiles and fiery temper; Irish, a true Celt in spite of two preceding American-born generations. Critical like his father, and passionate like his mother, he might be hard to live with, Mrs. Milenberg thought, yet she liked him. He had a clean, weather-darkened look, and the far-sighted eyes of the plainsman that at close range focus swift and vivid. His was not a happy face.

Mrs. Milenberg started when her husband broke in on her thoughts. She had not realized that dinner was over.

"Are we going to have coffee here?" he was asking, impatiently.

"No. I thought it would be nicer in the arbor. I hadn't noticed—" she answered, nervously.

"Let's go, then," he said in his curt way.

They passed through long drawing-rooms, the furnishing of which was so indicative of uneducated taste that Alyth shrugged mentally. His own drawing-room, though a less expensive conglomeration, hurt his finer sense in the same way. Alyth ventured a guess that Myra Milenberg had had nothing to do with the furnishing of the place.

But the house itself was an excellent imitation of an Italian villa. Milenberg had evidently not meddled with his architect's plans. It was charmingly placed on high ground above the town, with the wooded hills as background. The uppermost terrace, like the house, was Italian, but the next terrace, on the outer thrust of which was the arbor, was simply an old-fashioned, rambling garden; Milenberg's activities had not yet extended to it. This terrace, and the one below it, Milenberg informed the party, would be transformed in a year's time.

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"I mean to show New Rome a thing or two," he said, stirring his coffee in his decided way. "When I was a boy down there in New Rome, it was a sin to indulge in a luxury. A square of brick as solid as a monument, that was the thing—if a man was sure he could several times over afford it. There are dozens of such old houses down there—Mrs. Milenberg owns one of them."

"And now we mortgage to build a house we can't afford to keep," Alyth remarked, "and ride in automobiles we call ours and don't own."

"I like the old way best," Mrs. Milenberg ventured. "I like father's old house."

Her husband's eyes rested on her a moment, a glance bright and appraising. "Of course. You belong to your mother's time, my dear," he said, not ill-naturedly. "If it's a comfort to you, I'm glad you possess that old brick tomb with its stone stoop, and its fence and gate, and its back garden. I don't mean to be disrespectful of it. It's a thing that's had its day and passed out—that's all. . . . This is the age of advertising. Our houses, and our automobiles, and the clothes we put on our women's backs, it's all advertising!"

"Still, when we want a homelike party we always come down to mother's lovely garden," Myra interposed, lightly. "I am not pleased with you, Mr. Janniss, for advising father to spoil it by a fountain of playful water-nymphs. We prefer the beds of love-in-a-mist and clove-pinks, mother and I."

While her father was speaking she had risen and stood beside her mother. She patted her mother's cheek, drawing her gray head against her firm young hip, as one caresses a child. It was the first word Alyth had heard her say to Janniss since her acknowledgment of Milenberg's introduction, though the young man's eyes had been almost constantly upon her during dinner. And as they came down the terraces—St. Claire always at her side—



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Alyth had noticed how eagerly Janniss's glances had swept her from the crown of her small, well-set head to the arch of her slim foot, a commingling of intensely aroused masculine interest and artistic appreciation that Alyth gauged very accurately. Indiana had produced Karl Janniss. He was a talented young fellow who was rapidly making a name for himself, a clean-featured, steady-eyed young man of Saxon fairness. There was plenty of capability and determination in his firm chin.

He flushed, evidently taken by surprise. "Why not have the love-in-a-mist as well as the fountain?" he answered, quickly.

But Myra had turned away. "Mr. St. Claire wants me to take him over the grounds," she said, carelessly. On the way down Alyth had heard St. Claire begging her to walk with him after dinner.

Her mother brightened. "Some of the tea-roses are blooming yet. Pick one for Mr. St. Claire's coat, dear."

Mrs. Milenberg's naïveté certainly annoyed her daughter, but she covered it well. She drew her hands lightly from her mother's clasp.

"Mother is so proud of her roses that she wants every one decorated with them," she declared, laughingly. "Mr. Janniss, I will return with a rose for your coat; and for you, Mr. Alyth." And she turned away with a swing of her slim body that was gracefully expressive of independence. Both men had risen, and as she went Alyth's eyes followed her with quite as much admiration as did the artist's. There was something so spirited, yet so sweet about her; young as she was, she possessed a certain warm charm.

Alyth turned to catch the irritated glance Milenberg bestowed on his wife. Then he shrugged and drank his coffee in silence. When he set his cup down it was to speak tersely enough.

"Janniss, if you've finished, we'll go. Myra will want

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to take St. Claire for a ride. . . . Alyth, will you go with us?"

"Thanks—no," Alyth said. "I am going in to town. I want to see Mr. Baker."

"Take one of the motors, then."

Alyth declined. "Thank you, I prefer to walk; but first Mrs. Milenberg is going to show me her garden."

"As you like, only remember there's always a car in the garage at your service." And Milenberg carried the artist off, leaving his wife to fuss nervously with the coffee-urn.

Alyth had been amused by the family byplay, and in spite of the fact that he was heartily sorry for Myra Milenberg. Between them all she was not having a fair chance. It was she who was being married, and to Justin St. Claire. Alyth did not like St. Claire, and he knew that St. Claire reciprocated the feeling. Alyth knew too much, and St. Claire knew that he did.

As he drank his coffee, and then followed Mrs. Milenberg about the terrace, Alyth pondered man's unwritten law. His mouth was certainly sealed. It was Milenberg's province, the marrying of his daughter. But James Milenberg was a terribly consistent man; he would not condemn in another what he practised himself. Alyth looked at Mrs. Milenberg's shapeless back, and listened to her commonplace remarks with a distinct pity for her, and at the same time with a certain sympathy for Milenberg. . . . Life was a grand muddle! And morality a thing difficult of definition.

## CHAPTER II

AN hour later, as Alyth went out by the *porte-cochère*, he heard his named called:

"Mr. Alyth—"

He saw, to his surprise, when he turned, that it was Myra Milenberg; he had thought of her as riding with St. Claire. She was prepared, evidently, for riding, for she was cloaked and bonnetted, and pulling on gloves as she came. The bandlike framing of her little bonnet was particularly becoming, Alyth thought. It made her face appear all eyes, questioning eyes.

"You look prepared to tour Europe," he remarked. "I envy Mr. St. Claire."

"I am driving alone," she answered, with a touch of decision. "And you?"

"I am on my way to town. I have a call to make." Alyth guessed instantly that she had shied at her father's disposal of her, just as she had from her mother's.

"May I take you?"

Alyth welcomed the invitation. She was the only member of the family he had not fathomed. He had not yet decided that she was really intelligent—a modern girl's mock intelligence was frequently so well disguised. Probably her somewhat mature air of saying and doing what she pleased was her particular pose; possibly the appreciation of her father's dollars. Her suggestion of soft things, of silken garments, warm tints, and perfume, did not incline Alyth to a belief in her intelligence. But attractive she certainly was.



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"I don't wish to be a troublesome guest," he protested.

She smiled then. "But you are not. I want to ride with you or I should not have asked you. . . . Do you mind—we will have to walk to the garage? I don't know what has happened—possibly father has taken Wickham to drive his car, and the two garage boys are playing truant, or father's elaborate telephone system is out of order. I could get no answer to my call."

Talking easily, she led the way over a primly graveled and hedged road that farther along curved into an indenture in the hillside. Milenberg housed his motors well. The garage was on as princely a scale as the house.

"This mischance would please mother," she said. "She thinks inconveniences are chastening; she is very certain that in the days when people were hampered by inconveniences they were simpler and better people than they are now. Father is not satisfied unless it is possible for him to telephone—to New York if he wants to—without even rising from his bed. Father is an economizer of time—time is money." She spoke so smoothly that Alyth thought her sarcastic rather than candid. He did not like the trait; it reminded him of her father. Milenberg had a facile but biting tongue.

Alyth discovered that she was a good chauffeur. There was no one at the garage to extricate her machine. The garage contained a big limousine, a small car, and an electric brougham, and her own motor, a powerful machine with the long-nosed build of a racer. It was closely sandwiched between the limousine and electric, taking some skill in the handling, as the car had been carelessly run in behind it.

"The girls must have brought this in after father carried off Wickham in the tourer," Myra said. "They never think of any one but themselves, Irma and Ina—they don't need to. . . . They are my twin sisters, and

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younger than I," she added. Her comment on her sisters was as calmly expressed as her previous remarks.

Though Alyth was as good a machinist as the absent Wickham, he did not offer his services, for he was too much interested in his companion to interfere. She had thrown off her silk coat, for even its light weight was oppressive on that warm evening, and Alyth watched appreciatively the play of her pliant body as she twisted in the seat, busied with the levers, her head turned to look behind her or bent to watch the wheels. When she grazed the limousine, she said "*Damn*" with much the same gravity and subdued force as her father. In her cultured accents, and emanating from her exquisitely gowned personality, it struck Alyth as amusing. Her long cloak had covered her clinging dinner-gown, hiding her slippered feet; she had the thinness and nice muscles of a two-year-old, and the same suggestion of nervous strength; the back of her neck was firm and white, with little locks of curling hair straying on it. She was a very vital young thing, graceful and gracious—in spite of her softly forceful language.

When they backed into the driveway and came into position with a sweeping curve, she looked at Alyth for the first time. "We're off!" she said. The color was deep in her cheeks, her eyes bright.

They slipped around the house then, and down the slope of driveway and into a road that was an extension of the main street of New Rome. Alyth admired her perfect management of the machine.

"Why do you have a machine like this?" he asked. "Women usually like a high seat." His unexpressed opinion was, however, that the lounging position suited her.

"Because it has such a powerful engine. I like the feeling of handling something that is strong. It belongs to Eustace, really—my brother. Still, when he comes back from Europe Eustace may have a passion for horses.

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He has been coaching in England, and as he likes to be British, he will probably bring back a four-in-hand, and persuade some theatrical lady to grace the box. Eustace is an exasperation to father, and quite beyond poor mother's understanding."

Alyth did not know whether to think her flippant or not. She spoke gravely enough, as if simply stating facts impersonally and quite without prejudice.

They had reached the court-house square and had begun to thread their way between farmers' wagons, occasional automobiles, and groups of men. The middle of the street appeared to be a popular meeting-place for the men—it and the court-house steps. The court-house itself was an ambitious pillared structure with tiers of stone steps on the three sides intended to impress the public. Its top-heavy dome had cost the county an astonishing sum which had never been satisfactorily accounted for. At that date it leaked shamefully, Myra told Alyth, and was being repaired—also at great expense to the taxpayers.

"Graft is not unknown in New Rome, then," he remarked.

"I sometimes think the tendency originated here." The settled gravity of her reply recalled to Alyth Milenberg's record.

Alyth was interested in looking about him. Just as in his day, there were almost as many women as men in the square, most of them young girls. The elder women were either still busied with their shopping, or seated in their vehicles, waiting for their men-folk, anxious to be off to their farms before the mill-hands crowded the "Center" and filled the already active saloons. The girls from Mill City were already there, parading about. A little later they would flood the moving-picture shows or pair off with their beaux.

The better class of townsfolk were about also, both



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on foot and in automobiles, and Myra acknowledged greetings occasionally. Alyth knew almost every one who spoke to her and stared at him, not in recognition, but simply because he was Myra Milenberg's companion. The village characteristic was very familiar to Alyth. He was glad that ten years had so disguised him that he was not recognized. His family were all gone; there was no one in New Rome he cared to see, not even his father-in-law, yet he could not very well visit the town without calling upon Mr. Baker.

"You know, of course, that this is gala-night," Myra remarked.

"Yes, Saturday night—it is all more familiar to me than Wall Street. As we go on I'll show you the old Alyth house."

She looked at him with widened eyes. "Did *you* also originate in New Rome? . . . I did not realize that! . . . That was why my mother found so much to say to you. . . . So you are 'small-town' and 'Middle West' also. You do not look it. You have a New-Yorker's face—a fold between your brows, and your eyes a little tired—except when you happen to be really interested."

Alyth was amused. "I do not consider your remark a compliment. I subscribe heartily to the popular belief that 'the salt of our country comes from the Middle West.'"

"It's salt that drives one to drink," she returned, with some of her father's brusqueness. "We are so *exasperatingly* ordinary." She flushed a little over her quiet emphasis.

"There is no greater wonder on earth than Chicago," he said, both because he thought so and in order to see her eyes widen again.

She did look at him, but refused to be drawn. "Have we passed your old home?" she asked, a little disdainfully.

Alyth laughed at the check. "Yes, but it doesn't

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matter. I noticed that it looked exactly as it used, only somewhat more overshadowed by the new courthouse. I wonder if its chimney still sprinkles the place with soot. I remember Grandmother Alyth rather liked the dirt—it reminded her of Glasgow.”

“So your people were Scotch. My mother’s people were just Americans—which means a mixture of almost everything, I suppose, including Hebrew—and my father’s family on his mother’s side were Americans also; but my grandfather Milenberg was German. He was the cleverest man who ever came to New Rome. He was almost an old man when he came here. He had traveled a great deal. . . . I heard mother telling you about her hollyhocks. There is a family legend that Grandfather Milenberg collected the seed when traveling in Palestine. He was a scholar and a poet. I know now that some of the strange things I used to hear him say were just the remarks of a philosopher. . . . As you know, all New Rome is divided into three parts—Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist. The other ‘isms,’ such as the Scientists, don’t count. Grandfather Milenberg was not any of them; he was a ‘free-thinker.’ He was very fair to women, too; he judged them as he judged men—that is, he ‘judged not.’ I have a greater respect for my grandfather Milenberg than for any ancestor I possess; he was by nature *uncircumscribed*. . . . We have come the length of Main Street. Now where can I take you?”

Alyth had been too much absorbed by her to note where they were. They had crossed the town. Just before them, at the foot of the hill, the street parted into two roads, one leading off into level farm-land, the other climbing the slope and, as it circled the hill, disappearing into woodland.

Alyth cared little about seeing New Rome; it was his companion who interested him. “Anywhere—wherever you want to go,” he declared.

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"You have no choice?"

"None."

"You are not interested in New Rome?"

"Not particularly."

She smiled at him. "I thought you were not. But your call?"

"I can make it later."

Myra glanced behind her. The sun was almost set, going down behind another round-topped hill across the valley. Turning about, she increased speed. "Shall we go up to the Crotch and come down by Rock Creek? As soon as the sun goes we will have the moon."

"I should like it."

They climbed the hill, ate up the distance between them and the woodland, and pounded into it. The machine climbed well. Myra evidently meant to reach the Crotch before daylight faded, for she gave her whole attention to driving.

Alyth knew every inch of the way they were going; he had reason to remember it. It was the favorite drive of New Rome lovers, this steep, winding climb over one hill and nearly to the top of the next, that was united to it by a bridgelike strip of level land. Alyth wondered if the sentimental significance of the drive had gone out of fashion with the coming of the automobile. It was Saturday evening. In his day they would have passed more than one buggy creaking its way up the slope. Now they were quite alone on the hillside.

Most of the upward way was through woodland and, as they neared the top, between rocks interspersed with lower growth. Before they reached the Crotch the sun was gone, a clean drop out of a cloudless sky that suddenly bereft the hills of brightness. When they came out on the ridge the dimness of commingled twilight and moonlight was upon the valley below. The lights were appearing. Mill City was taking on its nightly resem-



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blance to the inferno. Furnace-sheds, smoke-stacks, train-loads of ore and steel, the panting activity of the day, all were blotted out; only the furnace fires showed, apparently outbursts from the earth, now flaring into a glow, now sinking into spots of hot red. Hung above the area of lifting and sinking fires were the steady outpourings from the smoke-stacks, the chimneys themselves invisible, only their belchings of flame-lighted smoke apparent. And in and about, strung like Christmas candles, were the whiter dots of electricity.

Then as they watched the lights paled, for the afterglow of sunset had come, a brilliant orange streaked by blood-stained fingers, and reaching almost to the zenith.

"We are a few minutes late," Myra said. "We will not get the view."

"But we have the lights and the afterglow."

Myra had silenced the engine and was leaning forward, arm on the wheel, looking down into the valley. Alyth could see her in profile, and he looked at her instead of at the lights below. He was beginning to understand that wide-eyed, direct way of hers. It had come to him suddenly, when she was speaking of her people, that she was a stranger to affectation or artifice. In her clean-cut impressions there was the brashness of youth, but she would go far and wear well—she was, as she had said of her grandfather, "by nature uncircumscribed."

And she was lovely. Either the intent urging of her machine up the hill had made her pale, or the twilight made her appear so. Framed in the little automobile bonnet, her face was very sweet and young and troubled. It occurred to Alyth that she had run away from too much urging, frightened at the decision that was imminent, and that she had chosen him for a companion rather than be alone.

Though thoroughly alive to her charm, it was her untamed youth that appealed most to Alyth. Just at this



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juncture he was in a mood to feel tremendous sympathy for the mistakes of youth. He was secretly rasped raw, passionately irritated, by what had been his own ignorant foolhardiness. Alyth had begun the evening with a somewhat cynical interest in the plunge into life that Myra Milenberg was about to take, the half-impatient, half-pitying interest of one behind the scenes. But something about the girl, possibly her perfect sincerity, had moved him. It was a shame to let her walk blindfold into St. Claire's arms. And it was of St. Claire she was thinking as she looked down at New Rome—Alyth knew it as well as if she were speaking his name.

The next moment she was speaking of him, clearly enough to Alyth's understanding. "That little, narrow-minded town down there," she said, evenly. "In the last few years the women have clubs, and the men also, but not a reading-room between them. Otherwise it is just the same environment that turned out my father and mother. It's absolutely material. It has fifteen saloons and no library. A country all around that is fat—*black*—it is so rich, and as a result a town full of kitchens and housefraus and thrift—just a continuous worship of prosperity. The seven churches are there just to make people feel more comfortable. . . . Father and mother carried the spirit of it up to a city filled with people who were all scurrying to make money. Then because father is shrewder than most he has outstripped them. Because it's easy for him to make money, and his pleasure to make a showing with it, we have become what we are, fair samples of the *nouveau riche*." She turned dark eyes on Alyth. "I was thinking, as I sat at dinner this evening, that I could not remember a family meal at which father did not mention money, and my mother's face was not troubled by the anxieties it has brought upon her—big houses, servants, children going their own way, a husband who only visits his home."

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Alyth was silent from surprise.

"Isn't it *true*, Mr. Alyth?"

"Yes, largely."

With a sudden quiver of passion she revealed the secret of her unrest. "I want something different! . . . I want some of the beautiful things—refinement, tenderness, honesty—a *real* oneness—the thing that so often is left out of marriage."

"Have you spoken as frankly to the man you love?" Alyth asked, abruptly.

She caught her breath, then was as direct. "You have guessed?"

"Yes—Justin St. Claire. . . . Have you said to him what you have just said to me?"

"Yes, that and more."

"Then why are you troubled?"

Even in the dim light he could see her face darkened by the color that flooded it. "Because—I am a coward, I suppose—" she confessed, finally.

He pushed her farther. He was suddenly determined; at times Alyth had all of his hot-headed mother's impulsiveness. What was the value of a vital experience if not to point the way to the untried? Yet, at the same time that impulse was thrusting at him, Alyth's cold judgment was assuring him that he was about to tilt at a windmill.

"If you do not doubt your lover, why have you spoken as you have?" Alyth understood perfectly the hurt and shame that kept her silent. "Shall I tell you why?" he asked then.

"Yes—"

"There is a doubt that struggles up through your love. St. Claire has swept you off your feet. You have known him only a short time, and—"

"I met him in his own home and among his own people," she interrupted, warmly. "We loved each other

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almost at once. He is all the things I have longed for. I think he asked me to marry him on that very first evening—I know it has been a continuous asking. I love him—if I should tell you how much I love him you would not believe me—and *yet* I am frightened. It is just that wretched cowardice of mine. I have seen so much that is forbidding in marriage, and all the miserable knowledge I possess rises up in me and makes me a coward. . . . I refused Mr. St. Claire and came to mother. I have been utterly unhappy. Then he went to father, and father has brought him here. . . . I don't know why I have talked to you in this way," she said, confusedly. "I have never in my life done such a thing. I don't know why I asked you to come up here. I don't know why I have been led into what must appear a treachery to the man I love—"

"You are caught in the current of desire, and there is no one for you to cling to," Alyth said.

The tears rose in her eyes. "Mr. Alyth, you can *see*—you understand—father and mother—"

"I know," he muttered. "The majority of parents show just as little sense in the marrying of their children. . . . And yet, left to ourselves, do we do any better? We're all alike, determinedly ignorant."

Myra drew a long breath. "It has done me good to talk—I don't know why—because I am a woman, I suppose." She spoke more lightly, but Alyth noticed how tightly her hands were gripped.

"I want the blessed relief of it myself sometimes," he confessed.

"I am glad you do—I feel less apologetic."

"One does not apologize to a friend," Alyth said. "It has come about oddly, but you and I are friends. At any rate, I know you will understand me when I say that a life experience seems to me wasted if it cannot be passed along—if it teaches nothing. Most probably I shall never see you again, yet if I went my way without a word I



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should be adding another regret to my already pretty bulky parcel of them. . . . It's simply that you seem to me so terribly young—just as I was when I made my mistake. . . . And, too, you are situated somewhat as I was. I am certain that almost ever since you could remember you have kept your own counsel. I have. My father was the kind who, if he wished to impress something upon his son's mind, did it with a thrashing. He never advised. My mother was always my partisan, though, as I soon discovered, she was too hot-headed and ignorant an adviser to be of any help. So I took to keeping my own counsel.

"I'm not given to talking of my private affairs, but possibly there is a lesson in it all for you. . . . Even as a child I meant to get out of New Rome. My father had some fat farms; he wanted to make a farmer of me. I was born a geologist; I meant to be a mining engineer. After a deal of friction I went to college, and on the smallest of allowances. In the summer I surveyed, worked in mills or in mining-camps. I didn't see much of New Rome in those four years.

"After I graduated I came home for a visit. I had the assayer's place at Mill City offered me, and I meant to keep it only for the summer—I had big plans for the future. . . . It was then I met the girl I married. . . . I was just twenty-two, and she nineteen. Her father was in the mills, a steady, thrifty man, working his way up. New Rome's attitude to the mills was just what it is now—every employee but the manager, the assayer, and the chief clerk were regarded as day-laborers. I met Caroline in the Center, just as the town boys meet the mill-girls now, and walked with her. The next night I rode with her. When I met her I had no more thought of seeking her than my six-year-old boy has of marrying his nurse. When I took her to within a block of her home that night after we had driven up and down these hills,



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I meant to marry her or die. The fever was on me; I could neither eat nor sleep. I had never had it before—not like that.”

Myra stirred restlessly, then leaned back, and to see her Alyth had to sit up.

“And what was it all for? She was small and round, and prettily coquettish in spite of her somewhat precise air. We had just the play of boy with girl—we had no conversation—it was an art she had never learned, and, though I was not a stupid boy, I didn’t miss it. I thought her ‘all the things I had ever longed for.’ I wanted her. . . . I was so hard put to it that, had I loved my father, or had the least confidence in my mother’s judgment, I should have gone to them. New Rome was the world to them; they could never be brought to see that the distinction between Mr. Baker and my father was purely an artificial one. Mr. Baker had really the superior capability. He has risen to be manager of the mills—no easy thing to do—and, besides, he has made money. New Rome’s attitude to him has changed. And in reality Caroline appeared as well as some of the girls in my own set. I was keen-witted enough to know all these things—the only thing I didn’t know was what was the matter with me, and just what actuated her.

“The result was that I persuaded Caroline to elope with me. I know that in so far as lay in her, in no lasting or profound way, she was involved as I was. But in addition she possessed a certain hard sense that is characteristic of those who wish to ‘get on.’ It has been her watchword, as it has been her father’s—the full scope of her inheritance. . . . Marrying was an easy matter—only a few words before a magistrate—and a week from the time I had first seen Caroline we were man and wife.” He stopped.

“And—?” Myra breathed.

“We have ‘gotten on,’” he answered, tonelessly. “We

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built on the foundation upon which the majority of marriages are built. Caroline has attained to the highest degree of intelligence possible to her, and I am still going on. We don't speak the same language—in fact, we never did, but that did not occur to me; I didn't realize that such things could be. No one had ever presented marriage to me except from the standpoints of so-called 'love'—his lip curled—"or worldly advantage. . . . One group—I think your mother is of that mind—was excited over the 'romance' of the thing; they still talk of it. Another group shook their heads over the rash proceeding—rash from the 'getting on' standpoint; and the third thought it most reprehensible that we had not had the church's sanction. They all entirely missed the gist of the whole matter."

"But I have not," Myra said.

"I thought you would understand—the thing that burned me is scorching you."

She made no reply.

"Go slow," Alyth said. "Mismating is *hell!*" He had concluded with sudden vehemence.

Myra sat up abruptly and took the wheel. "Shall we go on?" she murmured.

"Yes."

They came out into the full moonlight, and went on in silence until they began the downward slope. Half-way down, the road turned sharply at its union with Rock Creek, and from that on the subdued noise of their motor was drowned by the hiss and splash of water finding its uneasy way over a rough bed. The descent was so steep that the machine needed steady guiding, the patches of white moonlight and black shadow making a deceptive roadway, so Myra had an excuse for silence. But when they reached the valley she spoke.

"I can only do the best I can," she said, simply, and as if she had followed a line of thought to its conclusion.

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Then she asked the question that Alyth had decided he could not answer frankly. "Mr. Alyth—did—did you have any particular reason connected with Mr. St. Claire for saying what you have?"

Alyth had feared the question. "I don't want you to make my mistake. Passion is a poor guide," he answered, briefly. He had gone as far as he felt he could.

"Thank you—" she said, and they rode for some time in silence. When she did speak again it was of other things, but to Alyth's sharpened sense each word was tinged with subdued excitement.

At the *porte-cochère* St. Claire met them, a tall figure emerging suddenly from the dimly lighted hall, and Myra's well-sustained speech failed her then. Alyth could feel, without touching her, that her lover's unexpected nearness had set her to quivering. When Alyth offered his hand in parting, hers was burning, and she stumbled a little in her speech, for St. Claire's look of determination was easy to read. Alyth realized that St. Claire was angry, and with him. Did St. Claire doubt him, Alyth wondered? Hardly. He knew men and their code too well for that.

Alyth left them standing together, St. Claire's hand on Myra's arm.

## CHAPTER III

MYRA went up to her room and slowly removed her bonnet. She was quite unconscious of what she was doing, for it had been suggested by fright, this respite of a few moments; St. Claire was waiting for her below. The time had come for a decision—his face had told her so—and she was not ready to make it.

Myra saw vaguely her reflection in the glass—a face totally without color, the eyes large and bright, like a frightened deer's. Since the night, the third only after the time of their first meeting, when St. Claire had caught her and held her to him, fear had been upon her, fright and a throbbing delight so intense that it was pain. Myra was not of her mother's generation. She knew what the sudden hot leaping of her heart against St. Claire's meant; she knew what Alyth's warning meant. Was it *love* that she felt, and that St. Claire felt, or the thing that faded with time, that insufficient guarantee for the future that misled so many?

Myra Milenberg had been born before her father's more strenuous financial struggle had begun. She had grown to twelve years in a household that in its general plan differed very little from the households of New Rome, except that it was permeated by the more active atmosphere of a huge, striving city. In New Rome Milenberg had been partial partner with his father in the Milenberg Bank; in Chicago he had gone into brokerage. He had conned the city as a mariner his chart; he was alive to its big political and financial interests. It was his ambi-



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tion to direct the politician. When the opportunity came he was eager to shoulder the big men.

But he had shown his hand a little too early, and was punished for it. The city was ripe for a housecleaning, and Milenberg was offered up. The columns of publicity peppered with such words as "grand jury," "graft," "perjury," "penitentiary," her mother's shamed and terrified face, her father's cool fury and even cooler assurance to her mother that he was "a deal better than most of them," were things burnt upon Myra's memory. She heard then for the first time the expression, "failed rich," and applied to her father. From her school companions—not her mother—she had learned certain other things—what certain streets, certain houses, and certain women meant, and men's connection with them. Her father had not escaped that sort of egg-throwing. When the turmoil grew turgid she was taken from school, and, as school meant much to her, it fixed things in her mind. Even at that time she felt a vague wonder at her mother that grew as the years passed. Her mother knew what her husband was, and could go on!

Milenberg had had sufficient money and brains and steadfast assurance to carry him through. He had really no sense of shame. To him his partial overthrow had been simply a manifestation of superior Might, the only God he worshiped. To Milenberg there were just two divisions of the universe, strength and weakness. He had not been strong enough to dominate; he had been taught a lesson he would never forget. He went to work more shrewdly to buttress his fortune.

Having some of her father's alert intellect, Myra understood much. She watched her mother become a mere appendage. She knew, even before her mother did, that she was supplanted, set completely aside, her middle age before her to be lived as best she could. That she had borne her husband six children, stood by him through

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an ugly storm, sacrificing alike her scruples and her comeliness in so doing, weighed not at all in the balance.

When her mother collapsed under the revelation, it was Myra who had held her in her arms. "Why don't you leave him—why didn't you leave him years ago—before the twins came?" the girl said, between her teeth. Myra had a well-spring of sympathy for the under-dog in any struggle, a very real tenderness for every creature hampered by circumstances.

"I can't—I couldn't then," Mrs. Milenberg had whispered. "If I had taken you two children and gone, what would we have lived on? It would have broken up the family. It was my duty to go on. It's the sort of thing women have to bear. . . . He will be careful about outsiders knowing, but there is Eustace. If only it could be kept from Eustace—such an example—"

"Yes, as long as women insist on bearing it I suppose they will have it to bear," Myra had returned, hotly.

She did not tell her mother that Eustace had known before any of them. As time passed, with the peculiar conditions that develop in such families, Myra combined with her father to keep from her mother as much as possible of Eustace's doings. Eustace was the eldest, born after the death of Mrs. Milenberg's first two children, a handsome, worthless boy, and in consequence the more anxiously loved by his mother. Mrs. Milenberg had no social gifts—she had only her New Rome friends and some charitable interests—so her children were her life.

Myra had observed and understood. She understood both her father and her mother. Had she not been "by nature uncircumscribed" she would have been narrowed and hardened by her early contact with ugly realities. Her father and mother had combined curiously in her. She had of her father strong passions, a large indifference to convention, considerable intellectual force; and of her mother, sensitive nerves, a certain timidity, and an in-

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tense love of the beautiful. What was in Mrs. Milenberg a vague groping after the ideal was in Myra a definite conception. And being what she was, and standing, as she was now, on the threshold of life's great experience, and knowing that her feet were bound by passion, she was afraid—doubtful of the meaning of love, afraid of the havoc that "all the miserable knowledge" she possessed might work in the future. Afraid of marriage.

And in her perplexity her mother had been unable to help her. When she first fled from St. Claire's impurity it was with a longing for her mother's counsel.

"He startled you," Mrs. Milenberg soothed, "but you love him, or you would not have run away from him. Your father says there is not a woman in the country who wouldn't be proud to marry Mr. St. Claire. He is a fine man. I should be glad if you loved him enough to marry him, Myra, for some way we don't seem able to give you just the right chance. I suppose I am not enough of a society woman. It's often worried me when I think of you girls."

But Myra's distress had been too acute to be led aside from the main issue. "How do I know that I really love him? What do I really know of his mind or his heart? Until I have eaten his bread and slept in his arms will I ever know whether the thing he feels for me is really *love*? You must have married father not knowing anything about each other—not *anything*. . . . How do I know that after a time things will not be as they have been with you?" Her urgent need and her mother's inability to understand had driven her to inflict the hurt.

Mrs. Milenberg had grown white under it. "I don't—know—Myra. . . . I've sometimes thought it's having so much money makes your father feel he can do anything he likes—that there's nobody can gainsay him, not even God. You remind me of him sometimes—the free way you talk and think." Troubled though her daughter



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was, Mrs. Milenberg had been unable to refrain from rebuke. Myra had always puzzled her; she was not like herself when she was a girl, nor like any other girl of her girlhood acquaintance. Much as she loved her daughter, there was something repellent to her in the girl's freedom of thought.

Her mother had not helped her—nor, for that matter, had Alyth; he had only warned her. What was she to do? . . . Myra rested her hands on the dressing-table and looked into her own eyes, not conscious that it was herself she was addressing, "No one can tell me. . . . I can learn only by living—" Then, as if called by some one, she took up her cloak and went out.

To the end of her life Myra remembered that slow approach of hers to St. Claire. He was waiting at the stair-foot, tall, erect, determined, his brilliant eyes fixed on her, his dark head with its tilt backward thrown into relief by the golden tint of the wall behind him. He had something more than the impassioned demand of youth; he had the force of the man who has conquered often. She felt his power without realizing its source.

She came to him, her eyes fixed and wide, as they had been when she looked into the mirror, and he put his hand on her then, on her bare arm. "Let me take that," he said, softly, indicating her coat that was trailing on the stairs.

Myra looked down. She did not know she had brought it. "I do not need it," she said, with an effort.

"Let us have it, dear—we are going down to the garden."

He lifted it, and with his touch still on her arm, led her out through the drawing-room. There was no one about; a collection of chairs only on the upper terrace, upon which rested splotches of moonlight, as if at their approach every one had scurried away, bent upon leaving them alone. Myra had the intense longing for her



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mother's presence that had seized her when she had fled from St. Claire. But her mother had failed her; she had not helped her in the least, and, falling back upon the necessity that had brought her down to her waiting lover, she yielded herself to his urging.

"No, come down into the garden—where we will be alone," he begged, determinedly. "I must talk to you."

He drew her down the steps into the white light of the garden, to a bench behind the hollyhocks. He had chosen well; they were hidden from the house, the reaches of the valley below them, full in the moonlight, and quite alone.

"What is it that is so sweet here?" he asked then, in the same restrained way in which he had spoken from the beginning.

"The clove-pinks," she answered, indistinctly.

He bent and picked some of the blooms, putting them in her lap that his hand might find hers. He bent then to see her face. He was as white and tense as she. To his mature experience she had appeared so young and transparent, and, in spite of her quick intelligence and precocious knowledge, a primitive creature. Yet she had refused him, fled from him, and so determinedly resisted him.

St. Claire knew women exceedingly well. In the long period in which he had been legally bound, but in reality a bachelor, he had had turned upon him woman's complete battery: sentimentality, passion, deliberate calculation. He was considered, and knew himself to be, an exceedingly fascinating man to women, the more provocatively so because of his anomalous position, and because, in spite of his suggestion of ardor, his gift for love-making—a gift so often allied to great social charm—he was only very occasionally governed by impulse. He was not of a cold temperament, far from it, but from his boyhood he had lived in the public eye, and in a high-bred, apparently

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philanthropic manner, had catered to public opinion. Homage and the confidence of those about him were absolute necessities to his well-being; only when policy and inclination combined could he let himself go with any permanent satisfaction to himself.

For four years St. Claire had been free of his marital bond. For purely mercenary reasons, and in spite of grave risks, he had decided to marry again. When driven to it, St. Claire was capable of taking long chances. He was not nearly so rich as he was supposed to be. He had always lived extravagantly, and not always invested well. He was, in reality, a far better politician than a financier. In the last three years he had had financial anxieties that had made him eager to marry money—or moneyed influence. And he wanted to marry youth; he preferred not to subject himself to the clearer-eyed judgments of maturity.

Myra Milenberg had come upon him with a suddenness and definite appeal that was irresistible. Marriage with her meant such immense possibilities. He knew Milenberg; he had met the millionaire frequently, and had been deeply impressed by his ability and financial ramifications. And personally Myra pleased him. He received much the same impression of her that Alyth had: she was unformed, untried, and utterly sincere. She had charm and, St. Claire thought, the promise of unusual social capacity. Because of his deep-seated contempt for feminine intelligence St. Claire had given far less consideration than Alyth to her mentality. He knew instantly that he had attracted her, and with the swift sanction of his judgment he had played the impetuous lover and been transported by the part, for Myra was not a woman to leave a lover cold.

But St. Claire had received a check that, used as he was to conquest, had aroused all the combative in him. Myra had refused him in too definite a manner to leave

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him at all hopeful. He was quite keen enough to see that her shrinking from marriage was genuine. He had gone to Milenberg then, and had quickly discovered that the millionaire had a leaning to the advantages he had to offer. And yet, and in spite also of his conviction that Myra, beneath all her doubts and fears, loved him, St. Claire was doubtful of the outcome. Each conference with Milenberg left him the more tensely eager, and the more fearful of defeat, for Milenberg understood how not to sell cheaply.

St. Claire studied Myra's immobility now with a hot sense of very possible defeat. So long as a shadow of a chance remained he meant not to relinquish his suit, but with his inclination to take chances he was determined on this occasion to force an issue. He was gambling on the insight into her nature he had gained in her brief yielding to his embrace. He spoke steadily and determinedly enough.

"I am going to-morrow. I want to know if I am to go the happiest man living or with things finally ended between us—heaven opened to me by your hand, and then shut in my face? . . . I am not a boy, Myra—I can't be played with."

She was silent.

"I am not going to plead with you," St. Claire continued, husky in his intense anxiety. "I have offered every possible plea; every look I have given you has been a plea. I have heard your doubts of marriage—I have given you a gentleman's assurance. . . . Are you going to send me away for ever, Myra?"

It was her trembling that brought the blood of hope to his temples. His grip settled on her hands, his arm, circling her shoulders, lifting her face to his.

"Myra?"

"I cannot let you go," she said.

In the tremendous relief of it St. Claire was incoherent.

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He clasped her and held her, his strength against hers for a moment, until he found her lips and kissed her into yielding, a sobbing word offered to his whispered triumph.

"I've won—out—" he said between his kisses. "I have won you—"

Fright had taken Myra's breath at first—the well-remembered wish to escape. Then, as in their first embrace, resistance ebbed, and she was held close, her lips fully his, until tears choked her.

"I want—to be—happy," she said, brokenly. "I am so tired of—*meanness*—"

"You will be," he whispered. "Love will be a wonderful thing to you—you slim, wild thing that won't be held! . . . I want you to marry me soon. I want to take you into another life entirely."

"But you must give me time," she pleaded, breathlessly. "Sometimes I know I love you—and at others I am not sure. I can't promise till I know."

"When my arms are about you, you are sure, dear," he returned, determinedly.



## CHAPTER IV

FROM his window Alyth saw their slow return up the terraces, a dark figure, and beside it a spot of white. When they reached the lights of the upper terrace they were distinct. There was not the air of the rejected lover about St. Claire, nor of withdrawal on Myra's part. It was late; they must have been sitting a long time in the garden.

Alyth reflected that he might have spared himself the painful disclosure of his marital difficulties. What good had it done? There were few barriers an infatuation such as Myra Milenberg's would not leap. She had evidently cleared her barrier and grasped the future in her two firm, competent-looking hands—shown a little of her father's hard fiber.

Alyth did not like to acknowledge how thoroughly he had been stirred out of his usual self-restraint. He had always kept a tight hold upon his seething dissatisfaction. But to-night he had fairly gabbled over his affairs. It made him restless, disgusted with himself. The perfunctory call upon his father-in-law over, he had walked the town up and down and across, wherever recollection directed. Disjointed memories of his boyhood sent him to look at this spot and that; in the moonlight he could see even the irregularities in the crowns of the sugar-loaf hills that as a boy had tempted him to long afternoon rambles. It seemed to him that a boyhood of eager searching after the great and satisfying should have led to something more than his present state of unrest. So

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far his business interests had escaped the taint of futility; while working he was absorbed enough. But should interest in his profession fail him, he would be bereft indeed.

He had brought his thoughts back with him to Milenberg Villa, and there walked the floor with them. And now when he saw the loitering of the two on the terrace he confessed to himself that the cause of his restlessness had been Myra Milenberg's young, questioning face. He had been carrying about with him for a long time a feeling of pity for things unnecessary, and the situation had touched off his sympathy. It seemed so unnecessary that Myra Milenberg be taught life through Justin St. Claire. Alyth felt that he had done what he could to prevent it; it remained to be seen what she would do with the future she had embraced. He must be off in the morning to meet his own domestic complications as best he could. . . . But he was sorry for the girl. It was a pity.

Alyth had not telegraphed to his wife the exact time of his arrival. "Am well. Arrive Monday," was his message sent *en route*. From New Rome he had previously telegraphed, "Day in New Rome—at Milenberg's."

The last few years had been punctuated by telegraphic messages that had grown briefer as time passed. Now, almost every time Alyth hesitated over a telegraph blank, with the uncomfortable feeling that he ought at least to fill out ten words, he fell back on the conviction that all Caroline's well-being required was the frequent assurance that the source of supply was not likely to be cut off by any untoward circumstance. And in its train always came the reflection that he carried an extravagant life insurance. That would be a consolation if a telegram happened to miscarry.

There also frequently recurred to him a remark he had once heard a mining-man make: "When a man stops writing to his wife and takes to the ticker, look out!

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When he can't fill out ten words he's a sure goner." Alyth's message from New Rome had varied from the usual formula, because he knew that to Caroline, with her intense regard for money, the fact of his being Milenberg's guest would be a real satisfaction.

Usually when Alyth reached his office after a journey he called up his house to say whether or not he would get out to dinner; Caroline liked to be notified. This morning he was prompt. He telephoned even before opening his mail. The thought of his family had hung heavy on his mind throughout the journey.

It was his wife's carrying voice that answered, "Oh—you're back, are you, George?"

"Yes. How are you, and how are the boys?" Alyth asked.

"We're all right now. Dick hasn't been well. I had to take him to the doctor—" And she added a detail that made Alyth wince. Why intrust such things to the telephone? She was constantly rasping the fastidious in him.

"I shall be out for dinner. It will be good to see you all—and the garden—after that hot journey," he said, somewhat awkwardly.

"Well, there is a cook coming this afternoon, so it's all right. Hulda left on Thursday without a day's notice, and I've had trouble enough getting some one else. Then, of course, Alice had to go and hurt her back to-day, so I've had the boys on my hands. . . . Oh! and now I think of it—will you call up Sophie Ball for me, George, and ask her to come out for a few days—until Alice comes back? She's expensive, but I have to have somebody. This eternal trouble with servants will drive me mad in the end. I—"

"What is Sophie's number?" Alyth interrupted, for his wife's breath had begun to come short. From perpetual reiteration he was familiar with the subject. Caro-



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line was evidently too bothered over household affairs even to remember that he had very recently seen her father.

She gave the number and rang off with a hasty injunction not to forget. "We might as well save that long-distance call," she remarked.

Alyth swung the telephone aside with an expressive motion—as if there were other things he would like to fling after it. He sat for a few moments fingering his mail. With his mind's eye he could see Caroline perfectly as she had hurried with short steps to the telephone, seating herself solidly, knees well apart, a thick-set little figure rapidly growing stout. His return meant nothing to her—an added anxiety over dinner, perhaps. He was simply part of the usual order of things—part of the business of life.

That was the trouble with Caroline, Alyth reflected. Or rather it was the thing about her that appeared unchangeable, unsurmountable. She looked upon life and its various relations much as a man did upon his business, but not with the thrill he himself sometimes felt over accomplishment, for it was not in Caroline to be thrilled; and not with the gambler's excitement, for she was incapable of taking chances; but with the worrying persistence of the groceryman, or the butcher, who, if given time, will amass a considerable fortune. What was it Myra Milenberg had said? "We are so *exasperatingly ordinary!*" That was what Caroline was—ordinary, sordid, and to Alyth's desire for something very different—exasperatingly so.

Alyth had certain clearly defined complaints against his wife. Her very average intelligence he must forgive. It was her birthright, part of her when he married her. He constantly declared to himself that, had it been counterbalanced by an affectionate nature and a fair amount of mental elasticity, some capacity to progress, he would



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not complain. But Caroline had not progressed an inch in all the years he had known her. She had simply parted with the effervescence of youth, solidified.

And there was the other complaint. Under all his surface restraint Alyth was passionate. Or rather, he had an ardent temperament counterbalanced by a strong will. He was thirty, and with a temperate youth behind him. At twenty-eight Caroline had the indifference of middle age. Apparently the first years of marriage had drawn too much on her small reserve of both sentiment and passion, and the coming of their two children in the first four years of their marriage had completely exhausted the supply.

Alyth considered her wanting in more ways than one. She did not love children. Hers had come under protest, the monetary consideration being always uppermost with her. "We can't *afford* children and get on," she had always declared. She wanted no more children, nor did Alyth when he saw how the two they had wore upon her. They usurped what little warmth she possessed. She had the primal instinct to protect and cherish her offspring, and a strong sense of possession as well as the more modern carping anxiety over the future financial welfare of her boys; but apparently she had none of the exquisite joys of motherhood.

Alyth often realized that theirs was one of those unions in which children are a discordant element. The constant attending to their needs bred in Caroline a more continual thought of money, an irritation over added expense. She was in chronic distress over money, and without reason, Alyth thought. On the occasion when Alyth, inspired by her eagerness to become rich, had risked his small fortune in Wall Street and lost, she had shown a frantic terror that had almost deprived her of her reason.

And in him the paternal was not superabundantly

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developed. He had the average man's love for his children, the usual sense of duty and responsibility. Children could not take the place of the things that Alyth wanted, and that Myra Milenberg in her eager speech had defined better than he had ever attempted to define them for himself. "I want something different! . . . I want some of the beautiful things—refinement, tenderness, honesty—a *real* oneness, the thing that is so often left out of marriage."

It was certainly lacking in his marriage, Alyth reflected. He was not going home to that atmosphere.

## CHAPTER V

IT was sundown when Alyth alighted at Manor Park, and after a glance at the line of waiting automobiles started up the short street that brought him to Manor Park Place. He had not expected Caroline to send for him; she knew that when not hurried he preferred to walk. In good weather it was a pleasant walk of about a mile, tempting to any one as addicted to exercise as Alyth. It and his garden recompensed him for the inconvenience of a suburban residence, though of the many New York suburbs Manor Park was one of the most attractive. Even the streets leading up to Park Place were beautified by attractive homes. The Place itself had pretentious stone gateways, and because of its central strip of shrubs, flowers, and trees, wide driveways and spacious lawns, appeared really like a park. Almost its entire length commanded a view of the Sound.

Alyth's home was larger and newer than some of its neighbors, built evidently with an eye to effect, winged by porches, and with an outlook over the Sound. In its rear was a garden, which, because of a natural irregularity in the ground, was really artistic. It was the only thing about his home that Alyth liked; the house was too large and ornate for his taste and his income, and had been Caroline's choice.

"We can sell when we want to," she had insisted, "and in the mean time we have a handsome house to live in. It will bring you in business, having a showy house — 'there's nothing succeeds like success,' George." From

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the standpoint of business "hustle" Caroline was probably right, but Alyth took little satisfaction in the house they built.

Though the gloaming made it dim, Alyth rounded the house that he might see the garden before going in. It had grown into a habit, this stopping to collect a pleasing impression, a sort of arming himself for an encounter with disagreeables. He went in by the side entrance, passed through the drawing-room of which the Milenberg's had been a reminder, and, crossing the hall, entered the dining-room. Alyth expected to find the family at table, for, as usual, he had been delayed at the office.

He was right; they had nearly finished dinner. It was Jack who saw him first.

"Here's father," he announced, practically.

Caroline was busied with Dick, who sat beside her, and did not turn at once, not until she had finished wiping the boy's fingers. He had reached that stage when, hunger satisfied, he was playing with his food.

"If you don't eat your dinner and stop playing with it, I shall whip you!" she was saying, sharply, as Alyth paused at her chair.

"I want to go to father!" Dick cried, squirming.

"You'll sit here until I tell you you can get down. You'll mind when I speak to you, Dick, or I shall take you up and put you to bed in the dark, and let Jack sit up as long as he wants to. You've been bad all day—a *bad boy!*" Then, feeling Alyth's hand on her shoulder, she turned her cheek to his kiss. "What made you so late, George?" She barely glanced at him, for Dick had almost squirmed himself out of his high-chair, and she needed both hands to hold him. "You sit still as I told you!" she commanded.

As frequently before, Alyth stood and watched the struggle between Caroline and her son. "I won't!" the boy was saying through his teeth. "I've got a right to



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get down if I want to!" Then as he felt his mother's grip on him, her superior strength matched against his own, he screamed with rage. She loosed her hold enough to slap him soundly, her face as crimson as his own, then held him down firmly in his seat, in spite of his struggles and wild screams. She held him until he relaxed enough for her to pull him out of his chair and carry him off, shrieking, his purple face showing over her shoulder as she disappeared in the hall. Presently the struggle went on overhead—Caroline fulfilling her threat.

Alyth had gone around the table to his place, and sat without eating, his look cold. He had made no motion to interfere, no remark of any kind. When Jack was a baby there had been times when Alyth had objected to Caroline's methods, but he had long since learned the wisdom of silence. Caroline would brook no interference, and Alyth's own common sense had told him that even faulty methods were preferable to divergent ones.

"That's the second whipping Dick's had to-day," Jack remarked, in his practical way. He was taking advantage of his mother's absence to capture the sugar-bowl. He was a stockily built child of eight, regular-featured, and fair like his mother. As soon as his mother's back was turned he had appropriated the edibles she had refused him. He did it in a business-like way, and quite openly. Alyth had always noticed that his eldest son knew exactly what he wanted, and got it without screaming for it; a less nervous and imaginative child than Dick.

"Dick's been ill, hasn't he?" Alyth asked.

"He was pretty sick for two days. . . . Father, will you please pass me the cake?" The boy had an oddly grown-up way of speaking.

Alyth suspected. "Did your mother tell you not to eat cake?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, but that was just because Dick's been sick. That's no reason I shouldn't eat cake." The boy ex-

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pressed himself politely. Alyth had always demanded politeness of his boys, and was polite to them in return.

"Your mother probably had good reasons for forbidding you cake, sir."

"But I am not Dick," Jack persisted.

Alyth only looked at his son, a steady look from between drawn brows, and the boy subsided. Alyth had taken nothing to eat, and the maid was now offering him something. He glanced up at her. He had never seen her before; a new maid, evidently. It seemed to Alyth that every time he entered the house he encountered a strange face. It was one of the things that robbed the place of homelikeness. He felt a certain sense of shame at a stranger's being witness to the family disunion.

Jack had finished, and essayed conversation. "Did you go down in the mines, father?"

"Yes," said Alyth.

"Did they give you a lot of money for going?"

The question recalled something to Alyth's mind. He brought out from his pocket some specimens of gold quartz. "I picked these up for you and Dick," he said. "You see the gold? I'll bring some other specimens from the office if you will remind me, and tell you about them—the sort of places where they are found."

The boy examined them eagerly. "What would they sell for?" he asked.

Alyth studied him for a moment. "For very little," he replied.

"Oh," Jack said, in a disappointed way. He turned the specimens over once or twice, thoughtfully. "I guess I could trade them pretty well, though," he remarked. "Any boy who didn't know would think they were worth a lot."

"One of them belongs to your brother," Alyth said, dryly.

"I'll make the trade for him," Jack returned, capably.

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Alyth said no more. The boy was very like Caroline, and with the training he was receiving it was little wonder that at eight his mind ran on selling and trading. His mother knew the value of every piece of property in Manor Park. She was constantly talking of selling the house they were in, or of trading it, or of what their neighbors were doing with their property; of rise and decrease in value. She read the market reports every day, and commented on them—at breakfast, usually. The boy had his grandfather Baker's solid business sense as well as his features, and to counterbalance it his imagination needed stimulation; instead of that he was being given a sordid outlook upon life.

Alyth had finished almost as soon as Jack, for the commotion up-stairs took what little appetite he had. "Come out into the garden with me," he said.

Jack put his hand in his father's, and the two went out into the twilight. Moved by the sense of duty that had been warring so long with dissatisfaction, Alyth, as they walked up and down, began talking about the desert, the tropics, the land of perpetual snows, deliberately trying to stir the child's imagination. It was Dick, usually, who asked for "a story." Jack rarely asked for one, though when one was in the telling he took an intelligent interest.

An hour later, when Caroline came down-stairs she found them on the porch, Jack on his father's knee. "You must come now, Jack," she said.

"You said I could sit up as long as I liked," Jack objected, instantly. "I don't want to go yet."

Caroline's patience was worn rather threadbare. It was a warm night and she was tired. She tired easily, for in spite of her robust appearance she was not strong. She took no exercise in the open air; her house kept her too busy, she declared; she had no time even to walk in the garden. This evening she was more than usually



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weary, for it had taken Dick so long to sob himself into quiet.

"Don't be foolish!" she said, sharply. "I didn't mean that you could sit up all night. Come with me now!"

"You said I could sit up," Jack persisted, stubbornly. "Didn't she say so, father?"

Alyth wanted to say that if the boy were allowed to remain a little longer he would carry him up and put him to bed, but that would be contrary to the rule he had followed. As Caroline had charge of the children, he had no right to undermine her authority; he could not take her place.

"It's after your usual bedtime, and your mother is tired. You are too much of a gentleman to keep her standing around waiting for you. Go off now, and get to sleep as soon as you can. If you want to talk to me, come into my room to-morrow morning when I am dressing."

Jack hesitated, then went. Though only eight, he had begun to do his own thinking. It was useless to rebel against his mother's arbitrary rule. It was much easier to do a little calculating, and, when possible, circumvent her. He had counted much upon her unintentional permission, but a morning visit with his father appeared attractive. With Dick the appeal to his gentlemanly consideration would have had the most weight. He evidently gave his mother no trouble, for she returned very soon.

Alyth went into the drawing-room to get a chair for her, bringing it out before she knew what he was about—a low-seated rocker that she liked because it did not lift her feet from the floor. When she realized what he was doing she stopped him promptly.

"Don't bring that out on the porch, George; it's one of the best chairs! How long do you suppose I could keep the parlor-set looking decent if I let the chairs be



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dragged out here in the evenings? We can't afford to use mahogany for the porch."

"As you like," Alyth returned, his voice at its driest. "I had supposed we could afford to be comfortable."

He took the chair back, hot meantime with the irritation she so frequently aroused in him. What was the use of trying to adapt oneself to a nature such as hers? It was utterly impossible to change her in any way whatever, and he was a fool even to think of it. Why not simply provide for his family and then put them out of his mind? Even when in New York he could gain evening after evening away from home, the entire night if he wanted it. "Business" was always a sufficient excuse to Caroline, the prospect of winning a few extra dollars outweighing any satisfaction she might take in his presence.

Alyth almost gave up the idea he had been pondering for a long time. He had come home with the intention of talking to his wife. Even if he had to brave a scene, he meant to put some things to her plainly—convince her, if possible. She seemed to him at that moment about as impressible as a block of granite.

But he conquered his anger, as he had many times before. He walked the porch, his habit when no one was about, stopping occasionally to look at the trail of moonlight on the Sound. He was wondering how best to begin what he had to say, when Caroline's voice, made hard by suppressed irritation, prodded him again.

"George, do you have to walk up and down like that? It makes me nervous. I hear you clear up-stairs sometimes."

Alyth seated himself on the porch-rail and looked at her. He could see her features quite plainly, for she sat within the reach of the moonlight. It was kinder to her than the electric light or daylight, for it did not reveal the down on her cheeks or emphasize her double chin. It showed her blond and regular-featured, with a contour

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beginning to be coarsened by too much flesh. She had reached the Shetland-pony stage, the too compact, thick-bodied condition that in many small women precedes an unwieldy accumulation of flesh. Caroline was still a well-favored woman, however, for she had been a very pretty girl, petite, rounded, and fair. It was evident that to-night she was tired out, the weariness that comes with worriment. It showed itself in sharpened speech, the sagging of the muscles about her mouth, a lack of color. Alyth sat considering her, and withheld his retort.

She went on to another subject, apparently quite unconscious that she had spoken to him with all the impatience with which she was in the habit of reproving the boys; obtuseness in certain directions was characteristic of Caroline.

"How was father?" she asked. "You didn't tell me when you telephoned."

"Not well," Alyth answered, collectedly.

"His heart again, I suppose?"

"Yes; he seemed depressed about himself."

"Poor father!" she said, more softly, and fell into thought. It was some little time before she asked, "What do you suppose father is worth, George?"

"About seventy-five thousand." Alyth's tones were dry.

"I suppose he must be," she said, thoughtfully.

Alyth's sense of humor was stirred. He knew that Caroline loved her father next, certainly, to her children; but she had so quickly bridged the interval between her very sincere "Poor father!" and the question that followed. She was thinking now, intently, about what might be the safest and best way to invest seventy-five thousand dollars, should it suddenly come into her hands. He knew that she was feeling a fervor of gratitude over the fact that she was an only child and that her father

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had remained a widower. Alyth was gifted with tolerance, so, notwithstanding his feeling of half-contemptuous amusement, he was glad that Caroline's life contained that satisfaction. She had an attractive inheritance to consider. Did it rest her small brain much, he wondered?

The next moment he was shown that to those possessed as Caroline was there can be no rest.

"If you'd only kept away from Wall Street!" she said, with a sigh. "You threw away almost as much as that."

Alyth's face flamed. The sting had followed too quickly upon amusement. He understood in that one hot moment why occasionally a man for no apparent reason vanishes, leaving his wife to the mercy of the world. It was gone in a moment, but it had suddenly stiffened him to his task.

"I have a good deal more than twice seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of capacity in me," he returned, quietly, "but I may not be able to use it—if things go on as they are."

"What do you mean?" She sat up straight, trying to see his face more distinctly. It was his manner of speaking that had galvanized her.

"This house—our whole way of living *wears* on me. I can't go on with it."

She peered at him anxiously. "What is the matter, George? Have you been sick, and not told me?"

"No, I have not been ill."

"You have lost money, then!" she exclaimed, with a touch of the frantic anxiety he remembered so well.

"No, I have not lost money; I am making it. I am considered one of the best mining experts in the country, and I am only thirty-two."

"Then you've not been speculating again?"

"No, certainly not."

She dropped back in her chair.

"But I'm in a bad way, just the same," Alyth main-



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tained. "There are other things that can kill ambition and earning capacity in a man aside from ill-health and loss of money. They have not been killed in me yet, but I believe they will be in time—just as surely as you are losing your youth. . . . And the whole trouble is the *way we live*—the way we insist on thinking—you, in particular. It's a man's thoughts make him. It's aged me, tired me out in spirit. And what has it done to you? Your face and your voice tell the story. One can't shunt love, Caroline, and carp over money year in and year out without its showing in one's face. In your eagerness to 'get on' you don't even live healthfully. Built as you are, it's been an outrage both to yourself and to me to take no exercise except the worrying around the house you have to do because, with our income, we can't keep servants enough to run the place properly. Yet you insist on our having a car and a chauffeur, more to impress the people we know than for any actual comfort we take in it. The only real diversion you get is two or three card-parties a week. . . . We're living so senselessly that it's *abominable!*"

Alyth had deliberately assailed what little vanity Caroline possessed. Whatever the result, he meant to pierce her imperviousness. It was his conviction that nothing else than a dagger-point—or the loss of money—would stir her.

"If I've grown old worrying, it's because I've wanted you to do well and get on," she retorted, hotly. "It almost killed me when you lost our money. I work from morning till night trying to keep up this house and look after the boys, and then you—" She lost her voice.

"Yes," Alyth continued, with the air of one who hammers upon a nail that has struck an obstruction, "I have just said that is what you do, and that I see no necessity for it. You make yourself miserable, and keep me in a constant state of irritation, all because of your determina-



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tion to 'get on.' It's senseless, and I decline to go on with it."

"How else are we to live?" she demanded. "We have the two boys to provide for. Are we just to sit still and stay poor? . . . I don't know what you mean by saying that you won't go on as you are."

Anxiety was sharpening her irritation now. The hurt to her vanity was nothing to the searing-iron of anxiety. Caroline had a deep-seated conviction that Alyth was not an astute business man. To her ignorance his one financial overthrow was certain proof of it. His constant impatience over her determination to turn an enviably prosperous face to the world, on one hand, and her penny-saving propensity, on the other, convinced her that Alyth had no worldly wisdom. To her narrowly ordered mind his attitude toward life indicated a certain irresponsibility, a dangerous quality that she had always combated. She was alarmed. What impractical thing was he considering now? She was up in arms to protect the law of her being, a certain painful, plodding acquisitiveness.

"I'll explain what I mean. . . . Just consider my day for a moment—as I see it—*not* as you do. When I'm here I get into town by nine o'clock. So far my days have interested me. It's come to be the only thing in my life that does interest me—my business, and not because I make money out of it, simply because it's my most natural form of self-expression. There's always been a joy in it that I have carefully guarded from the mere money-getting spirit. But I have to hear about money, and think about it; it's connected with everything a man does; the universe appears to hinge on it; so I find it difficult enough to keep separate my joy in working from the usual craving to make money. To my mind a man's home should be the place in which he refreshes his spirit.

"Well, I come back here. The moment I look at this house I see the unpaid balance on it. It doesn't worry me

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in the way it does you, for I know I can pay for it many times over, but the place does not mean *home* to me. In your own words, it's an investment! It's no *home*! This place that you are fretting yourself into a middle-aged woman over, that the boys don't dare scratch, that I don't dare to be comfortable in, that to the first bidder—that bids enough—we'll sell 'furnished as it stands'—this big, imposing house hasn't even the stability of an Arab's tent, for that he furls and takes with him. . . . It's not the way to live, Caroline."

She had cooled into anxious opposition. "But every one does it, George. It's a way of making money and living in a nice house at the same time. I'm willing to take the bother of it if we can make a little money."

"Good God!" Alyth said in sudden exasperation. "I seem to be talking at a stone wall! Of course people do it! That's one reason there are so few homes, or any sort of home feeling! We've commercialized even our homes. . . . And don't you see, Caroline, that you are the crux of the whole matter—that what the home is depends on *you*? Can't you understand that what I want to do away with is just this everlasting worry of yours over money? . . . If it's a possible thing, I'd like to change your whole outlook upon life. That's probably an impossibility, but I do know that we can better things if you will consent."

She kept to her main anxiety. "What do you mean you want to do about the house?"

"Sell it."

"Have you had an offer?" she asked, quickly.

"Carpenter will buy it any day; you know his offer."

"And you'd let it go for that?" she said, with contempt.

"Gladly, to be rid of it and be able to do something else."

"And what is that, pray."

"Ocean View Avenue is not so fashionable a location as this, but there is more natural beauty there, a grove

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for the boys to play in, and a wonderful chance for a garden. I'd like to build there—not a house like this—God forbid!—but a simple, artistic place that the boys could grow up in and we can always keep. There is a cottage there now; it could be moved back and fitted up for the boys—a schoolroom and playroom for them. Then the thing I should be extravagant about would be a nursery governess for them, some one who is a lady and has intelligence as well—such people can be found for money. . . . You would be pretty free then, Caroline—time to read, time to come up to the theaters and other places with me. If you wanted to do it, you could go with me on my journeys sometimes. I have to go to Europe this winter. You could go perfectly well. If you will only recognize that you are in a groove, and try to get out of it, I believe you can.” Alyth had ended with more of pleading than Caroline had heard from him for years.

She was silent, at first from surprise, then from unconquerable disapproval.

“Something of the kind is easily possible,” Alyth added, with the instant sensing of her opposition. “I repeat that I can't go on as I am.”

The threat touched off the anger Caroline was trying to control. She felt that she had borne a good deal; impractical talk of sacrificing the house that she had labored over so hard, and that she had meant from the beginning to be a stepping-stone to a second paying investment of the same kind; the ridiculous idea of relinquishing the prestige a home in Park Place gave; her changed appearance, of which she was sometimes conscious, held up to her; but most hotly angering of all, Alyth's suggestion about the children. Since a disastrous quarrel or two over Jack, Alyth had attempted to hide his disapproval of her methods, but Caroline had guessed his thoughts and secretly swelled with defiance. She was rearing her boys as she had been reared, and would continue to do so!



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"You talk of sacrificing property, and investing in a place that won't increase in value, and hiring nursery governesses and all such, as if you had a million!" she said, angrily. "A mother's place is with her children. Do you suppose I'd leave my boys and run about as you say? . . . Indeed I wouldn't!"

Alyth managed to keep his temper. "We are not living in New Rome, Caroline. We have progressed a bit since you and I were children. It's dawned on some of us that we are the worst possible educators of our own children. We have to 'run around' a bit—in the sense in which I meant it—if we are going to keep pace with them, to say nothing of guiding them. . . . The plan I outlined is perfectly feasible. We would be out of debt then, have a real home over our heads, and under a different régime you and I might be something more to each other than we have been of late years."

"I don't want to do it, George," Caroline said, quivering with nervous dread. "And I don't see how you can sell the house without my consent. How do you suppose it would look for us to sell here at a sacrifice and go off to Ocean View Avenue to live in a cheap house? Everybody'd say you were in difficulties. It would hurt your business. How would I explain it to the women I know? They'd think we were a couple of idiots. . . . The whole thing is ridiculous—just one of your impractical ideas. . . . As for my children—they'll stay with their mother!" She ended more hotly than she had begun.

There was silence for a time. Then Alyth asked, quietly, "I suppose you have counted the cost? . . . Or are you too ignorant to realize?"

"I don't know what you mean?" she said, almost in tears. "I don't know what you mean by saying that you won't go on as you are." And Alyth knew that she did not know; that she was really incapable of compre-



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hending his ideal of a home, or of understanding his need. She was densely ignorant of man's nature; ignorant about herself; ignorant about the natures of her children. She was shrewd in only one direction, because all the intelligence she possessed had been concentrated on a single idea.

"I mean," Alyth said, deliberately endeavoring to present to her a phase that must impress even her obtuseness—"I mean that if I must live in a home I don't own, with children reared to think of nothing but buying and selling, with a wife who has only a cold cheek for me when I enter, and who *insists* on living in a way that is going in time to deaden the best in me—from day's end to day's end nothing but a continual pressure on me to earn, *earn*, to 'get on,' to 'get on'—a strap across the shoulders of a pack-horse—if I *must* have such a home, I'll endeavor to live out of it as much as I possibly can." He turned about and made for the garden.

Caroline sat dumb, then caught her breath from the shock of a too sudden suspicion. She sat quite still under it for a time, for on the instant she had jumped to a conclusion. She was bathed for a moment in the heat of conviction—not the desolation of love, or its instant desire for the thing departed—simply the quick, blind leap of anger. It brought her to her feet.

"I suppose you are in love with some other woman. Well, you are welcome to her!" she called after him. "I don't want you!"

Then as Alyth went on without answer, she sat down to think, at first breathlessly, then deliberately. . . . Could the other woman drive her from her home? . . . Not if she persisted in spite of everything to do her duty as housekeeper and mother. She would give him no divorce, not she! . . . Jealous certainty takes quick strides, and in Caroline's hurried going the entire conversation appeared pregnant with a meaning inimical to herself. To Caroline

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marriage meant certain material advantages, the conservation of property for the benefit of the family. No, she would cling to her present surroundings like a leech. She would not be forced into a disruption. If, at Alyth's urging, she gave up her home, where would she be? He might refuse to provide another for her and she would be forced to go to her father.

Panic had her again for a space, and she stood at bay. Just let him try to dislodge her! . . . Then because of the knowledge of her husband's nature, that is vouchsafed even to a woman as mentally inelastic as Caroline, the instinctive recognition of the world-truth that man is essentially conventional, pre-eminently a creature of custom, a close respecter of the laws he himself has builded; that it is woman who is the incalculable quantity because she is merely the acceptor of man's laws and at heart unbound by them—because of her subconscious knowledge, Caroline relaxed into relief. Alyth would do nothing of the kind: he would follow the middle course. In one respect he would go his own way—he had man's unwritten law as sanction, for under the much-respected Seventh Commandment man has written for man the word, "leniency." In looking back Caroline could see that for a long time she and Alyth had merely endured each other, though until this evening she had not thought particularly about it.

No, let him go his own way if he would. What great difference did it make to her? But married they were; outwardly the bond held good, and Alyth would recognize the fact. He loved his children; he was devoted to his profession. What young business man with success well within reach wants a domestic upheaval? She could hold him securely enough to the main issue—remain head of his house, provider for her and her children he must and would be.

It did not occur to Caroline to wonder why at one leap

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she had landed in the midst of distrust, suspicion, calculation—a feeling as pronounced as cold hatred of her husband. It was Alyth who had realized how gradual and complete their growing apart had been. It was realization that had driven him to a last desperate effort.

“I have done what I could,” he repeated now, as he hurried out of reach of her voice. “I have done what I could—and I’m damned sorry for the boys! They’ll be the ones hardest hit.”

Alyth had come to the very end of the garden. Here he was enveloped in scented stillness. There was a path where he could walk, an outlook over the Sound, its strip of dimpled water, and in the dimmer reaches lights that came and went. He was thinking in a hot, aching way of his boys. Caroline would cease to be a wife after this, and that hateful house less of a home—he knew himself and Caroline well enough to predict that. . . . The thing would end in the divorce court, of course, and Caroline would demand her pound of flesh. He would have to abandon his boys—leave them to grow up like Caroline. . . . A bitter thing that!

Then, as Caroline had well known, the alternative presented itself—the inclination to the conventional, the adaptation to usage, the line of least resistance; keep his half-hold on his boys; keep his business intact; conserve and not disrupt. . . . He would have himself to fight; he had had himself to fight this many a day, and he could keep it up; *but*, if endurance failed him, there was the usual compromise open to him; there were few who would blame him—either men or women.

Alyth pondered as he walked back and forth, until a sound beyond the garden wall halted him—a woman’s low laugh followed by a deeper murmur, a man’s rejoinder—his neighbors were making love. The pair had come out into the moonlight, moving slowly, and Alyth watched them. The woman’s light gown, distinct against

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the darker form, reminded him suddenly and vividly of Myra Milenberg's questioning face. The eternal quest! She also was loitering in the moonlight—a woman in the making. The whole world was mating, and he was denied the joy!

Alyth turned away from the lovers, head up-flung, a gust of revolt shaking him, his mother's hot blood for the moment aflame. He was young enough and ardent enough to find his mate and build again. The middle course—bah! There was the taste of sawdust and ashes about it!



## CHAPTER VI

A WOMAN in the making—yes.

During those early September days St. Claire was trying hard to win more than a half-promise from Myra Milenberg. He studied the self-questioning, passionate, hesitant girl with all the care and caution a man bestows on a tremendous venture, for it had become that with St. Claire, both because he was banking on Milenberg, and because a struggle between instinct and passion like Myra's aroused every art of capture he possessed. He wanted the unquestioning adoration that so many women had given him; he had a huge conceit that demanded it.

St. Claire remained at Myra's side, part of the time a guest in her father's house, afterward staying in New Rome. He would not risk absence. He had no mind for a long engagement; he needed Milenberg's financial help too badly; so he was pleading that they be married in November—before Thanksgiving—that they might go to the Tennessee mountains for their honeymoon—in time for the glory of the Indian summer. Then he could take her home at the beginning of the season, and show her to his immense connection, prouder than any king had ever been of his bride. It was his declaration that he would not be able to think or work without her that moved Myra most.

Milenberg watched St. Claire's tactics with no little interest. He was certainly a wonder with women. He realized that the secret of the man's success was the secret of most success, a tremendous belief in one's own power.

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St. Claire had the unalterable conviction that he could subjugate any woman if he approached her rightly. He was thoroughly Old World in his estimate of women—a surface deference and chivalry covering a vast sense of superiority.

Milenberg judged the man who wished to become his son-in-law with the cool accuracy with which he judged every man. He thought St. Claire “smooth” to the point of genius. The man was worldly wise enough not to be thinking of marriage if there were objections that could not be easily straightened out. Milenberg did not trouble himself on that score; he had perfect confidence in St. Claire’s wise handling of any such matter. He could use St. Claire to his advantage, and he wanted his daughter married to a man who could give her social position, and, through her, social opportunities to his two younger daughters.

As a rule Milenberg disapproved of Myra. The girl had an independent bias, an unconventional viewpoint, and an intolerance of generally accepted standards that was highly irritating. It wasn’t the thing for a woman; it was dangerous. To marry her to any such boy as Eustace would mean matrimonial suicide. St. Claire evidently meant to rule her through her emotions, which Milenberg believed was the only successful way to govern a woman—that is, if she had temperament—and if not, by economic pressure. Milenberg had almost as little regard for a woman’s intellect as St. Claire himself had.

Milenberg judged to a nicety St. Claire’s social prestige, his legal ability, his influence, and his popularity. How he could be useful to St. Claire was quite as clear to him as were the various ways in which St. Claire could be valuable. Opposition to corporate power was on the increase. St. Claire had served corporations for years; he had also served the government. Milenberg wanted the interested advice of just such a man. The situa-

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tion was sufficiently serious to keep him at home for a longer period than usual. With the patience he always had at command when engineering a matter of importance, he kept Karl Janniss busy over his portrait and waited.

It was Mrs. Milenberg who worried over the situation. Myra was a riddle to her. The girl grew pale and thinner, her great eyes more and more dominating her face. Just what troubled her daughter Mrs. Milenberg could not imagine, but certainly she did not look happy, and she could not bear to see it. St. Claire was so exactly the sort of man she in her girlhood would have worshiped—handsome, charming, clever, and thoroughly correct. To her intense satisfaction she had discovered that his people had always been churchmen and conservatives; that he himself was on the governing board of almost every important charity in his city, and a frequent lecturer to organizations like the Y. M. C. A.

And yet, life having dealt Mrs. Milenberg some hard blows, she began to question in the depths of her own mind whether possibly all was not so fair as it seemed. St. Claire was such an attractive man. There were certain things that would be insurmountable to Myra. Mrs. Milenberg declined to actually think of any such complication; having been reared on the theory that fostering an illusion does much to make it a reality, that what you decline to see does not exist, she was quite incapable of thinking or speaking in a straightforward way about the most ordinary and natural manifestations of nature. She would as soon have thought of playing about over the church spires of New Rome in an aeroplane as to question St. Claire about his past; in her day such matters were left to the man of the house. She shrank even from discussing the subject with her husband.

She did, however, on one occasion, approach it obliquely. "Have you noticed, James, Myra doesn't seem happy?" she ventured.



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"Um—" said Milenberg. "I don't know that I have."

"Mr. St. Claire seems such a—such a good man to me . . . such a Christian gentleman?" Mrs. Milenberg persisted.

Her husband gave her one of his faintly amused glances. "Of course," he agreed, dryly. "I hadn't thought of him in just that light, though. . . . Myra has sense enough not to demand the impossible, my dear, and when he marries her St. Claire will know how to govern his wife, which is much more to the point. . . . I think I wouldn't worry over the matter if I were you. St. Claire is handling his case very well, in my estimation."

Mrs. Milenberg scurried away from the disagreeable subject, but she took then to hovering over her daughter. One night she tiptoed into Myra's room to make unnecessary inquiries about the bedding and the windows. Myra had come up from the garden, where she had been with St. Claire, and was already in bed, a long, slim outline beneath the lace coverlid.

"Mr. Jänniss has about finished your father's portrait," she remarked, apropos of nothing. She was going, for Myra had not asked her to stay.

Myra reached out suddenly and drew her to the bed. "Sit down, mother," she said in low tones. She put her arms around her then, laying her head in her mother's lap. Mrs. Milenberg could not remember her having done such a thing since she was a child. It was more often Myra who watched over her mother as over a child.

Mrs. Milenberg stroked the girl's abundant hair, her throat aching, she did not know why. "You're so pretty these days, Myra; I don't believe I ever saw you look so pretty," she said in her helpless way; "but you are thinner."

"It's loving makes me thin." The confession was like Myra's usual ungirlish candor.

"You love him a great deal, don't you?"



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"Yes. . . . So much that I can't think straight."

Mrs. Milenberg went timorously on. "You seem to be worried. . . . Is there anything about—about—Mr. St. Claire that makes you unhappy, Myra?"

Myra always had an instant reading of her mother's mind. "No," she said, steadily, "not in the way you mean. I asked Justin to be honest with me, and he has been. I couldn't love a man who was not straightforward about himself."

Mrs. Milenberg breathed her relief. It was like the girl to take the matter into her own hands—do her own questioning. "You ought to be happy then, Myra, yet you don't seem to be. Why is it, dear?"

Myra did not answer for a moment; then she said, slowly, "It is myself—mostly—"

"But you said you loved him?"

"I am afraid of myself," Myra said, in the same slow, painful way, as if she were drawing thoughts up from some great depth. "There is so much in me to be satisfied. . . . Will he give me the things I want—or will I starve? . . . I want to be *near* him—I don't mean caressed. I want to see more into his mind and his heart; I want him to care more to see into mine. . . . I try to tell him, and he touches me—and—I can't even whisper. . . . It's as if he meant me not to think—"

"It's just that you love each other so much," her mother said.

"Is it loving each other—really—to know nothing about each other? . . . Is it fair that I must go into a thing I don't understand, and tied hand and foot beforehand, with only just this feeling of—weakness?" She was burning. She drew herself out of her mother's arms and sat up.

Mrs. Milenberg felt a little desperate. "I don't know why you feel so uncertain, unless it is that he is so much older than you, and you feel the difference. But you

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never liked boys. . . . I do think he is desperately in love with you, Myra. If you sent him away, I think it would be dreadful for you!"

"I would send him away if I thought in the end it would bring us nearer to each other."

Her mother's fears were up in arms. She was desperately afraid of some rashness on Myra's part. "I don't believe it would. And if he should give you up, Myra! He might very well think you didn't love him. I don't know just what it is that is troubling you, and probably Mr. St. Claire doesn't. You have so many advanced ideas, Myra. I don't believe girls nowadays do know what they want. When I was a girl we didn't know so much, nor question so much. We took what came to us and tried to be satisfied. We felt that if we did our duty, we were doing the very best we could. I've always tried to believe that way. What good does all this knowing and questioning do? It only makes you girls dissatisfied!" Mrs. Milenberg was at last voicing her secret protest, quoting from her gospel of passivity.

"I know, mother, I know," Myra said, wearily. "We have simply grown up in different schools, you and I. What appears a duty to you may not appear so to me."

"I have tried to bring you up in the right way, Myra." Her mother was very near tears.

"I know you did," Myra said, "what you thought the right way. You were brought up to wear blinders, mother, and when you tried to put them on me I shook them off. My intelligence wouldn't have it. . . . I have a brain as well as—feelings—to be satisfied, and if it is not I shall be wretched. . . . You have helped me to put it into words, mother. If I have to be to my husband only—" She stopped abruptly, for the unspoken words were, "what you have been to yours."

Mrs. Milenberg was still struggling with the tightness in her throat. "I've tried to bring you up to be a dutiful

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wife and a loving mother, Myra. I don't see why you haven't every reason to be happy—"

"Poor mother!" Myra said, with sudden tenderness. "You have been dear to me always!" She put her arms about her mother's neck, turning her face to her own hot cheek. "I want to be a loving and an *intelligent* wife and mother—I want it more even than you can want it, dear—so when I can't think straight, when things don't seem to me to be as they should be, I am frightened. None of you seem to understand, and yet all of you are urging me—" Her hot clasp was so tight it hurt.

Mrs. Milenberg was shocked. "I didn't know any one had said a word to you—except Mr. St. Claire himself. It's natural for him to urge!"

Myra only drew a quick breath. Then after a time she said, more quietly: "You see, mother, it seems to me that love should be a great peace—a deep certainty. . . . Not as it is with me."

"That will come afterward," Mrs. Milenberg urged.

Myra went on with her thoughts. "Perhaps it is only a child that gives you that—great happiness. . . . Is it? . . . Did you have it, mother—that big content—when I came?"

*This* was a matter of which Mrs. Milenberg could speak understandingly and without embarrassment. "Yes, indeed, I was happy!" she said, earnestly. "There is no joy like it, Myra."

"I want a child," her daughter said; her voice had deepened and quickened.

Mrs. Milenberg did not like the baldness of the statement, but she went on. "A child makes up to you for everything, Myra. There's been things hard for me to bear, but just you alone have repaid me for all I have suffered—repaid me over and over again. . . . I don't want you to throw away your chance of happiness."

They sat then for some time, listening to the night



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sounds from the terraces below. It was very still, a dark night. They could even hear distinctly footsteps on the graveled path, a steady pacing back and forth. Myra reached over and touched her mother. "He is there!" she whispered, tensely. "He can't sleep!"

Her mother's answer was sharpened by reproach. There was in it woman's always ready pity for the man. "You are making him *wretched*, Myra!"

Her daughter flung up her hands, an impassioned gesture. "I know it—" she said, suddenly choking. "I know it! . . . Oh, *mother*, what shall I do?"

It was out at last, the cry for help, a choking, smothering cry from a convulsed child who clung to her like one drowning. Mrs. Milenberg, helpless and frightened, crept into bed and held her, uncomprehending except vaguely, and with only the blind advice to offer, "You love him so much—I should marry him, dear."

Myra sobbed out her repetitions of uncertainty, her revelations of emotion, her needs in the future, a struggling, smothering endeavor to disentangle from the mesh of doubt and passion the ideal that eluded her; a reiteration as frequent as her mother's refrain.

She sobbed herself in the end into utter exhaustion; like the student who, after poring all night over a problem that remains unsolved, in the gray of morning sees the open page still before him, but grown dim and wavering, his brain too lax to answer any longer to the prodding of his tired will.

## CHAPTER VII

NEVERTHELESS, after those hours of distress Myra was better able to define her ideal and reach a decision.

St. Claire took her up to the ridge between the hills to look out upon a valley that, though it was mid-morning, was still streaked with mist. There was a hint of autumn in the air, a chill that allowed the dew to still sparkle on the spikes of sumac, making them look succulent.

It was Myra who had always driven, but this morning she had silently obeyed St. Claire when he announced that he would drive. One glance at her white face with its blue-tinged eyelids told him that a crisis of some sort was at hand. As they went on he could study her face, for she was not looking at him, only at the objects they passed, though in a vague way, as if her eyes conveyed no distinct impression to her brain. Was she too exhausted by the long struggle to any longer offer resistance, or was she suffering because she must hurt him? St. Claire also was pale, but bright-eyed, intent, alert. It was when the pounding beneath them ceased that she realized where they were, and turned to meet his intently questioning look.

"Justin—"

"Yes?" he said, quickly.

"I am sorry for these last weeks—if I have made you unhappy—I couldn't help it. . . . I will marry you when you want me to."

It leapt at him and through him, the same tremendous

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relief that had swept him from his feet once before. It seemed her part to surprise him completely. It was her utter sincerity, her clean directness, a quality so foreign to his own nature that it often amazed him. He was unable to see in it anything but a total lack of astuteness, a certain childlike simplicity that laid her open to deception. Still, he knew better now than to touch her. He let the first wave of emotion pass before he put his arms about her.

"My darling—" She turned her face to his shoulder, and he kissed her neck then—where the curls of hair rested on it. He lifted her hand and kissed it. "My darling, you are good to me."

She raised her head so she could speak. "Justin—I have tried to tell you; our marriage must mean a great friendship as well as—a wish for each other, or we will grow apart. We must have the same conception, and the same ideals, or we can *never* be really one. . . . I care far more for the understanding between us than I do for the marriage service, for what is not in the heart and the head cannot be put there by the mere saying of words."

"I know what you mean, dear, and what you want, I want. You shall make of our life whatever you will. . . . But won't you give up doubting and questioning from now on? For my sake—for love's sake. Dream a little—give yourself up to the joy of love. The past doesn't matter particularly, and the future will be in your hands. . . . I want to kiss the color into your cheeks, my little wife to be."

St. Claire was thinking, as he had often before, that she possessed a jumble of ideas that sat crosswise of her temperament. To his mind there was but one way to dominate a nature such as hers—treat her as one would any other spoiled woman, show deference to her notions, but make himself master of her emotions. A creature with



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deer's eyes, and the lips and body of love itself, talking modern trash!

But it was a long time before he kissed and soothed her into silence, and only after she had talked fully and earnestly about the future, her desires that she must be assured were his also.

"Let us make a real home, Justin," she begged. "A home with children in it, a place that is apart from the rest of the world, not a house built for the public like that awful thing of father's down there that hasn't a particle of love to make it beautiful. . . . I am so thankful that you do not care for money. It is one of the things I love in you."

"You take the right view, dear," he agreed, tenderly. "Put your arms about my neck; tell me that you love me. I want to see you look happy."

He allowed her then to draw from him the promise that he would go back to his work and leave her "to prepare myself for the home we are going to make," as she phrased it. And after his long conference with Milenberg that afternoon he was ready to go. With St. Claire love was a period of emotional intensity that had nothing to do with the serious affairs of life, and there were serious enough questions now pending his decision.

Mrs. Milenberg was tearful when St. Claire spoke his graceful words of approaching kinship. It was relief as much as anything else that made her weep. Her daughter was going to be happy; this was a fortunate outcome of a night of misery.

To her father Myra went alone. She made the announcement of her engagement in her usual direct way: "You know, father, that Mr. St. Claire wants me to marry him. I have promised that it shall be in November."

"Have you?" said Milenberg, briefly. "Well, I'm glad."

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He was seated at his desk, and looked up at his daughter in a business-like way, his keen eyes noting her expression. Milenberg was not given to demonstrations of affection, and least of all to his eldest daughter, whose disapproval of him he realized perfectly. But he had hardly expected the girl to look so grave. At the same time he liked the direct way in which she had expressed herself. If she had shown sentimentality, he would have been barely tolerant and have dismissed her as soon as possible.

"Mother is pleased, and you are, too, are you not, father?" she asked.

"I think he is the husband for you." Milenberg studied her keenly, for his quick perception told him that her manner was respectfully purposeful.

"I should like, then, to ask a favor of you, father. I know you want my marriage to be a happy one, and that is the big thing I want. I shall feel so much more satisfied if I am independent, so what I am asking is for you to make me so—I mean in the way of money. . . . I do not want much, just enough to feel that I could live on it if I had to. But I should like to have it my own, given outright to me, and then I want you to show me how to manage it."

Milenberg looked at her without change of expression. "I suppose St. Claire advised it?" he said then.

Myra was positive. "No, Justin has never said a word to me about money—in any connection. It is just a thing I have thought out for myself. If Eustace started in business you would give him a sum to set him up. I have heard you offer it to him if he would only go to work. In a way, I am starting out in business, and I should feel happier, more mistress of my future, if I did not go to Justin as a dependent. . . . Don't you see what I mean, father?"

Myra had ended with a touch of pleading, for she had

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instantly sensed her father's cool consideration. Milenberg never took his eyes from the man with whom he was doing business. If possible, he held him, eye to eye, the only indication he ever showed of his chasing thoughts being a slight filming of his steel-pointed gaze. He had fixed Myra in the same way, and she understood him well enough to know that he was considering swiftly and unalterably, even when he asked, with his usual brevity and curt smile:

"Aren't you preparing for trouble betimes?"

The tears gathered in her eyes. "I thought I was preparing to be happy. . . . Women are happier if they are independent, father." Her mother's bitter complaint. "If I had taken you children and gone, what would we have lived on?" was as fresh in Myra's mind as the day it was uttered.

Milenberg took his eyes from her, shoving back his chair to rise, and Myra knew then that he had decided, but what she had no means of telling.

"I'm not so sure of that," he said, in the not ill-natured way in which he so often spoke to her mother. "Well—we'll see about it."

He stood beside her, a little, trim man, arms straight at his sides. Milenberg never fidgeted or fingered anything, which was probably the reason why he impressed others as being a taller man than he was. His only caress now was the hand he put on Myra's shoulder.

"Go on, and don't worry," he said, in his commanding way. "I'll see to it that you don't go to your husband empty-handed. I'm worth a few thousands to Justin St. Claire. . . . Let me tell you something—you're a baby with notions. You've taken the bridle off your thoughts, and still have a check-rein on your emotions, and it don't work with women—that. It makes them want to turn the world upside down. . . . You run along now, and get that check I gave your mother for you. It ought to make



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your eyes dance. Just get to work on your clothes and leave your future 'independence' to me. After you've been married a week I'll wager you'll have forgotten you ever lost sleep over the subject. . . . Go on now!"

There was no use urging, Myra knew that. Her father's millions were his own, and by right of acquirement; he could give or withhold as pleased him.

But she protested. "Thank you for the check, father; but I don't want a huge trousseau—indeed I don't—or a big wedding!"

"Nonsense!" her father said, with a good-natured forbearance that was not without its edge of command. "You can't expect to marry one of the best-known men in this part of the world and not make a bit of a fuss over it. St. Claire expects it. Besides, you'd be depriving your mother of one of the biggest pleasures of her life. If you care anything about her, let her fuss over you for the next two months. I've given her *carte blanche*. . . . Run along now, and good-by for the present. I'm off to Chicago with Janniss. I have a mind to make that young man—he's pleased me with my portrait."

There was no withstanding him; he held too firmly grasped the handle of the economic whip. Myra thanked him somewhat indistinctly and went. But she was distraught under her mother's excited satisfaction. Mrs. Milenberg was very happy. She had always looked forward to Myra's wedding; the girl was so beautiful; it was such a delight to dress her, to touch her, to make her lovely for that greatest event in a woman's life. It revived her own girlhood, carried her back over the years, many of which had been unbeautiful, to the time of dreams, of sentiment.

Myra took it all very quietly. There was the hush of solemnity upon her. That big future of which she was constantly thinking was so near. She had decided, vested her all, turned her back upon doubt. She held her

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ideal firmly clasped, both she and it enveloped in the love of the man who had won her. She had his assurance; he was one with her in thought as well as in feeling. Love began to run deep and strong in her.

It was true that his daily letters did not satisfy, for, skilful though he was, St. Claire failed on paper; he was not present to give grace to his somewhat trite love-making, and had Myra been more experienced she would have known better how to classify the lack. As it was she laid the blame upon herself. She expected too much. "What you want, I want—I have no wishes apart from yours. Our life together is yours to mold," he wrote. What more could she ask? Myra was already, though quite unconsciously, drawing on woman's sublime capacity to drape an inadequacy in the garment of idealization.

Then after three weeks St. Claire came, bright of eye, head high, deferential yet compelling. His presence stilled the small ache in her. With his arms about her, and the tender echoing of her every thought, the last vestige of doubt vanished, and there was born the thing that is love in its entirety, a willingness for self-sacrifice, a tremendous faith in the object beloved, a conviction of perfect unity. With her hand in his Myra answered to the law of her being, an utterly sincere revelation of herself. She opened her mind and her heart to him, permitting him to look into the depths and up to the heights of her nature, quite unconscious of the fact that he was short of vision, and that his thoughts traveled in a narrow channel built for them by tradition, and cemented in by much unlovely experience.

For St. Claire was exercising to the utmost his extraordinary power of surface adaptation, his genius for being seen as he wished to be seen. Myra's idealization of him delighted him. She was proving herself entirely feminine, after all. Even when in her deeply emotional way she expressed her craving for home-building, her pride in

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the old-fashioned house hung with portraits of his kin that had been his father's home and would now be theirs and in the future the home of their children, St. Claire did not allow himself to be disturbed. His face hardened when she told him, "I dream of our love sometimes, and when I wake—for a moment—I feel a child's little hand striking on my breast; but when I feel for it, it is gone."

It was a look that came and then went quickly, that brilliant, unmoved expression of his. Why be disturbed by a girl's fancies? What she needed was an emotional outlet. He felt secure in his empire over her. It was inconceivable that, emotion satisfied, ambition should not assert itself. Having grown up in a family such as Milenberg's, she was certain to grasp the social advantages he would give her. Her ideas would change with her environment. Certainly she could not fill the place he intended she should and retain her conception of their future. Young as she was, he intended that she should be a social leader. His wife should lead socially, and he financially, in the city of his birth. There were big plans and vast ambitions fomenting in St. Claire's brain.

He came twice before the fifteenth of November, when he took his bride from Milenberg's arm. They were married in Chicago in the most fashionable church in the city, and stared at by several hundred faces—Milenberg's huge business connection, the contingent from New Rome that came with a certain pleased importance, and a number of St. Claire's friends.

St. Claire looked upon the wedding as engineered by Milenberg with secret contempt, but there was no gain-saying the fact that he was marrying an heiress, and in a business way the fact was of great importance; the more wide-spread the advertisement given it the better. St. Claire came of a family that for generations had adhered to conventional good taste. He had gradually



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and skilfully withdrawn from the old order and embraced the new; grafted the methods of the omnivorously acquisitive upon the old tree of conservatism. St. Claire passed gracefully enough through the ordeal.

He took a girl who was so imbued with the tremendous import of the future that she was white and dazed. In the last weeks they did with her what they would. She was very young, and had had but a short time in which to collect a few of the undigested ideas that womanhood is throwing off from its intensely awakened mentality. At the eleventh hour her untried convictions failed her. She had not meant to be loaded with an army of trunks and chests of lavish gifts, and yet without even an income that her father could withdraw at will. She had not meant that her husband's arms should close on her with the rattle of a train beneath them, even though the car that was their bridal chamber was a private one, one of her father's many bridal gifts. She had not meant to be made a public spectacle of, and, above all, she had not intended to say the things that had been required of her. She had conceived a simple ritual to which she could truthfully acquiesce.

All things were different from what she intended; only her ideal, withdrawn deep within her, persisted, and it was that that rose to meet her husband's possessive kiss. What did it matter, all this paraphernalia of custom with which they had draped her? The thing that beat upon her heart, and that her love in all its immensity rose to meet, was simply part of the tremendous creative force of nature, world-wide, ages-old, reaching into the future far beyond human ken. . . . It was their unity of purpose that made them one—lovers and comrades for life—*life-builders*.

## CHAPTER VIII

IT had sleeted, then rained, sheathing everything in ice. Alyth's cab had come slowly up the long slope of the Boulevard, skidding, in spite of its chained wheels, as it drew up before the Imperial Club. Alyth had come direct from the station and was, as he knew, on time for his appointment.

In the library he chose a seat in one of the windows that commanded a view of the club entrance. It was four o'clock, usually the hour of automobile traffic on the Boulevard. To-day there were no femininely guided electric broughams with their fleeting revelations of veils and plumes, otherwise the passing and repassing was much the same as usual, for in spite of the slippery paving it was a tempting day in which to ride. A bitter morning had moderated into a pleasant afternoon, not mild enough for a thaw, but sunny—a glistening world canopied by deep blue.

The comfortable atmosphere of the club was welcome after four days of travel across the plains, so Alyth felt no impatience when he noticed that he had waited half an hour. He was somewhat lazily occupied with his thoughts. He always enjoyed visiting St. Louis; the city impressed him as Eastern when compared with the far West. It boasted mansions half a century old—like the house opposite, which was a huge mansarded structure with a wide flight of stone steps leading up to its entrance. It was perhaps of a somewhat later period, 1880, possibly, and undoubtedly had been a grand house

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in its day. The Boulevard extended miles beyond the club now, westward, always westward, leaving the old homes of the city standing like grim-faced widows in rusty weeds, smudged all over with signs of neglect. This house, Alyth decided, bore the marks of a boarding-house. It had uninviting sash-curtains; in an up-stairs window was perched a frightened-looking milk-bottle, unmistakable sign of the unwelcome boarding-house baby.

Alyth was familiar with the internal architecture of these forsaken old homes: walls heavily papered; tall, narrow windows cumbered with Venetian blinds, smothered in lace a half-century old, and side-hung with velvet; a tremendous height of ceiling corniced and dadoed; heavy mantel-shelves bearing immense mirrors in wide gilt frames. Inartistic, certainly, the whole effect, within as well as without, but possessed of dignity, nevertheless. There was an air of melancholy about the gray face of the house opposite, a mute indictment of a rushing, consuming generation.

Alyth was thinking of the instability of the American home, when his attention was attracted by a splendidly appointed car that had drawn up at the club entrance. The woman on the back seat evidently did not shrink from the ice-chilled air, for the car was open. Muffled in fur as she was, Alyth could not see her face. The man beside her sprang out, standing for a moment with bared head, talking to her. Then she dropped back in the seat and the car swept on.

Alyth had recognized the man—it was Karl Janniss. Alyth had seen him some six weeks before in New York, and he remembered now that Janniss had spoken of several Middle West commissions. He was going to exhibit in Chicago and St. Louis, he had told Alyth. During the last year Alyth had seen something of Janniss, and had found him companionable. No man as devoted to his



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profession as Alyth could help respecting the artist's talent and his tremendous capacity for work.

Alyth thought that possibly Janniss was bound for the billiard-room, and in that case he would have sent a page after him. But Janniss evidently preferred the quiet of the library. His expressive face lighted with pleasure when he saw Alyth.

"You here!" he exclaimed, shaking hands cordially. "Of all the surprises!"

"I have an appointment with Milenberg," Alyth explained. "He is late—an unusual thing for him."

"Have something with me, then," Janniss offered. "I am put up here, though most of the time I am at the St. Claires'. I am painting a ward of St. Claire's, a Miss Courland, who is visiting them."

Alyth indicated the house opposite. "When did they leave the St. Claire home?"

"Last spring, I believe—about six months after their marriage."

"I remember this old house very well," Alyth said. "It impressed me. I was in it several times a few years ago—when St. Claire first went in for mining property. I remember the walls were hung with portraits, generations of St. Claires, and a splendid thing of Justin himself, done in 1900 by Zorn. There was a full-length portrait of his mother, too, a French Creole, St. Claire told me she was, a voluptuous woman with brilliant dark eyes and ripe lips. He looks much more like her than like his father. His father was thin-lipped and fair, with the look of a Scotchman about him, and I know there is a decided Scotch admixture in his family."

"St. Claire has loaned the collection to the Art Museum here. It's something of an advertisement, of course, and, too, they would be out of keeping with the white-and-gold and old-rose elegance of Woodmansie Place."

Alyth noted the faint sneer. "Milenberg tells me that

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the St. Claire house is the most impressive thing in the city," Alyth remarked.

Janniss's brow puckered slightly. "It's a thoroughly American structure, an adaptation from something or other Colonial—big pillars supporting an upper story in front, and a walled courtyard at the side. At any rate, it affords superb rooms for entertaining, and as St. Claire stands forefront now in the moneyed set, that is an important item. As the house is on a knoll in Woodmansie Place, it does have a good view—I'll say that for it." He shrugged slightly. "It is ostentatious, so I suppose it is 'impressive.'"

Janniss's remarks interested Alyth. From Milenberg Alyth had gathered that he was deeply pleased with his daughter's marriage. How was it with Myra herself? Alyth wondered. He had thought often of her, the girl of eager wishes and aspirations who had chosen him for a companion at New Rome, and to whom he had spoken with a frankness unusual with him. She had changed greatly if such a home pleased her.

"Was the place Mrs. St. Claire's choice?" he asked.

"It was bought ready-made, I believe," Janniss returned, carelessly. "How long will you be here, Alyth?"

He had changed the subject too abruptly, Alyth thought, and he studied him in his coolly critical way. The young man looked exceedingly well. There was a subdued glow about him, an almost impassioned energy. Erect, clean-featured, blue-gray eyes under a square brow, a shock of fair hair, a determined chin, and a mobile mouth—a noticeable young man. He had told Alyth once that he was just under thirty; he looked possibly twenty-eight. Alyth liked him for a certain wholesome-mindedness that in spite of women's flattery, and his own intense appreciation of the sensuously beautiful, remained unspoiled. He painted the luxurious and the purely emotional woman marvelously well. An art critic had once remarked

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to Alyth, "I wonder what he would make of a girl with a soul?" And Alyth had returned, "Marry her, I think." The critic had laughed as at a good joke, and Alyth had not troubled to explain his meaning.

Alyth dropped the subject of Myra St. Claire for the moment. He asked Janniss, instead, about his work, and Janniss launched out instantly. His exhibits had been a great success. Milenberg's portrait had caused much admiring comment. Miss Courland's portrait, though it had so far been seen by only a few, was being talked about.

"Because I've dared to paint her truthfully, I suppose," he said, with a flash of the eye and a squaring of his determined-looking chin.

"I've heard the name before," Alyth said. "Just who is she?"

"St. Claire's sister-in-law—his first wife's sister." There was a suggestion in his curt speech that was enlightening.

"Of course. I remember now. . . . Do you mean that she shows signs of the family affliction?"

"No, no. . . . She is simply—well—emotionally eccentric. She has kicked the shins of convention occasionally, which is, of course, an unpardonable sin. For the last few years she has lived in Paris. It is her money and her family altitude that have preserved a sort of position for her here. Now that she is back here, and to stay, Mrs. St. Claire has been seeing her through. She has made society swallow Adele Courland, whether it liked to or not."

Alyth looked his interest.

"I'm not gossiping, of course," Janniss continued, more lightly. "It's simply that I've been painting Miss Adele Courland pretty continuously for some weeks, and I am full of my subject."

Alyth led back to the things that interested him most. "Milenberg is here a good deal, isn't he?"



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"It's more his home than Chicago, I think."

"And Mrs. Milenberg?"

"She is in New York with the two younger girls. They are at a finishing-school, I believe."

Then Alyth asked his question. "Has her marriage changed Mrs. St. Claire much?"

Janniss had witnessed the courtship in New Rome; he was quite observant enough to have drawn conclusions. Janniss finished his high-ball and set the glass down.

"She appears older," he said, briefly. Then, as if uncomfortable over his brevity, he became more diffuse. "She does a tremendous amount socially, you know. She is considered the most socially ambitious woman in the city, and she already pretty much leads. She strikes one as a bit unique though, young and clever and beautiful, with the most 'impressive' house in the place, and, as backing, St. Claire's social prestige and the Milenberg money."

The young man's manner was so determinedly detached that Alyth dropped the subject. He spoke instead of St. Claire. "From what I hear, St. Claire is making money rapidly."

"Yes, he and Milenberg appear to be working in combination. St. Claire has dropped most of his practice—or rather he turns over to his firm all but the big things that take him to Washington and New York. He is giving most of his time to finance."

"It has always had a fascination for him."

"Is he really fitted for it, Alyth?" Janniss asked, with a touch of earnestness.

"No," Alyth said, quietly.

"I am no judge—but I have wondered. . . . You know him better than I."

It was Alyth now who changed the subject. "Do you happen to know if Milenberg is in town to-day? It is not like him to be late for an appointment. He tele-

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graphed me from Chicago to meet him here on my way east."

"He is here—staying at the St. Claires'. I saw him at dinner last night. . . . And there he is in person," Janniss said, pointing, "and St. Claire with him."

A car was depositing two men at the door. Even with fur collars turned up and caps drawn down to their eyes, Milenberg's short figure and St. Claire's height were recognizable. Janniss left before they entered, so Alyth was alone when they came in.

"I told St. Claire you'd be here. I've never known you to miss an appointment," was Milenberg's greeting. "I know I've broken my good record to-day, but from no fault of mine. We skidded into an electric pole down there and just missed a smash-up."

St. Claire greeted Alyth with his usual courtesy. "I am afraid you have not been taken care of since you came in. If the papers are right, you have been running through a blizzard in Kansas, and need warming. . . . What will you have?"

"Nothing, thanks," Alyth said. "Janniss has been with me until a few minutes ago, so I have not suffered."

"Oh! Well, that's good."

Alyth thought of St. Claire, as he had of Janniss, that he was looking extremely well. Alyth had not seen him since their meeting in New Rome. The only change sixteen months had made in him was a scarcely perceptible addition in weight, and a touch of gray over his temples. Except in a strong light the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes were not noticeable. He was as splendid a specimen of animal perfection as ever; handsomer, if possible, because of that touch of gray. Alyth had not expected to see St. Claire. He needed no more than St. Claire's air of oneness with Milenberg to assure him that Janniss was right when he said that the two were in combination. It was perhaps as well for St. Claire that he

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was Milenberg's son-in-law, Alyth reflected, for, with all his astuteness, he was not a match for the elder man.

As usual, Milenberg plunged at once into business. "You telegraphed to 'go ahead,'" he said. "Now let's have your reasons."

"In six months' time Tropeca will be shipping ore," Alyth returned, briefly.

"I have it pretty straight that Harmon has advised the Morans to leave it alone."

"Harmon's mistaken. Lay your hands on all you can is my advice."

"And I always take it, don't I? I'd no sooner put your telegram down than I telegraphed Parsons to 'go ahead,' as you said; but now your reasons, man—your reasons!"

Alyth gave them succinctly, and almost at the first word Milenberg's eyes, though immovably fixed on him, dimmed slightly, the sign with him of intent thought. He sat for a moment in silence after Alyth had finished, then without a word he was up and off, not hurriedly, briskly only.

St. Claire's and Alyth's eyes met, and St. Claire laughed. "The telephone," he said, and Alyth nodded. St. Claire talked of nothings with his usual graceful air until Milenberg returned, and then there was only an instant's hesitation in his cordial seconding of Milenberg's suggestion that Alyth dine with them at Woodmansie Place.

If St. Claire's distrust of him had mattered in the least, Alyth would have declined. But he wanted greatly to go. He wanted to see Myra St. Claire. He had often wondered what sixteen months of contact with Justin St. Claire had done to the girl who had chosen him as temporary confidant. Janniss's studied air of detachment had only increased his interest. He accepted with thanks.

"Why not come on out with us, then?" Milenberg said, hospitably. "We'll send down for your luggage."



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"Of course. Why should you go down-town again?" St. Claire exclaimed.

But that Alyth declined. His wish to see Myra did not carry him to the point of consenting to sleep under St. Claire's roof. Besides, there was a woman whom he wished to visit—if she was in the city. Whom he had always visited when he came. To Alyth she was part of the city, connected with every recollection he had of the place.

## CHAPTER IX

THE intervening two hours had sped so rapidly that when again borne up the Boulevard Alyth feared he would be late for dinner; as it was not a clear night, the slippery street made travel slower than usual. When his taxicab reached the Park and passed the monument that did sentinel duty at its entrance, the Boulevard lay straight before him, a glistening way lined with lights, apparently leading direct to the towers of the university. The sunset glow had not yet left the horizon, but was shrunk to a gash of crimson, a hot throat revealed between parted lips. Against it the two towers of the university stood out like jagged teeth upthrust from a somber jaw. They appeared to be speeding into a glowing maw.

The illusion vanished on reaching the university grounds, for now the towers winged by their quadrangle showed distinctly. Alyth passed then "places" that were indicated by pillared and lighted entrances, the marvelous growth of a few years' time, the ambitious western outreach of the city. Several were as yet places in the making, tenanted only by a mansion or two.

Woodmansie Place was beyond, and still in the country, woodland lying between it and the outer limits of the city. The St. Claire house, well lighted and solidly crowning its own particular knoll, stood foremost, and even in the dimness Alyth could see that it was an imposing structure. The lights in the portico revealed the pillars of which Janniss had spoken. Looking behind

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him as he came up the driveway, Alyth could see the vast reaches of the city, a foreground of scattered lights wide in extent, and, beyond that, massed lights banked to the eastern sky-line.

A car had slipped by him as he turned into the driveway, and was preceding him up the slope. When he gained the level it had deposited its occupant, a woman, as Alyth could see fleetingly, and was circling the walled courtyard on its way to the huge garage beyond. Alyth guessed that Myra St. Claire was only a moment before him; he was, at any rate, no later than his hostess.

When he was ushered in by the much-liveried footman, Milenberg was asking for her. "What keeps Mrs. St. Claire?" he was demanding. He greeted Alyth with his usual lack of ceremony. "Hello, Alyth! You didn't happen to pass a breakdown on your way out here, did you?"

"*Madame est arrivée. Elle va descendre immédiatement,*" the footman said.

At Milenberg's blank and irritated look the butler who guarded the drawing-room door, interpreted, with dignity, "Madame has just entered, monsieur. She will descend in a moment."

"Oh, very well, very well, Nicole," said Milenberg. "I thought it was only a taxi I heard."

"Mine," Alyth said.

St. Claire came forward then, and brought Alyth to the group at the fireside—Karl Janniss, a little white-haired woman with dark, sparkling eyes, and a young woman in red—a black-and-white creature with indomitable eyes and a scarlet mouth.

"My cousin, Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice—and Miss Courland," St. Claire said.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice gave Alyth a small hand that was hard in spite of its glove, and after a brightly appraising glance, which Alyth returned with one as critical,



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she took up again her animated conversation with St. Claire. Alyth had frequently heard of Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice. Adele Courland's hand was ungloved and clung a little in its touch. She enveloped Alyth in her gaze, a consuming survey, before she took possession of him. Janniss had been seated beside her; he stood now with Alyth as the latter drank his cocktail.

"You were in Paris about this time last year, were you not?" she asked, and, at Alyth's surprised acknowledgment, smiled. "You are asking yourself, '*Ou?*' are you not, monsieur? . . . I will supply you with the setting—the Café de la Paix. Your table adjoined mine. You were with an American lady who, when she rose and passed out with you, was noticed by every one in the room—*une femme magnifique! . . . N'est pas, monsieur?*" She had spoken softly; now she laughed also in the same subdued way. Her voice was pitched so that St. Claire and Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice could not hear.

Janniss had heard, and was looking interestedly from Alyth to Adele. He was wondering whether she meant to be malicious or only whimsical. He had learned to interpret her with some accuracy, but this attack upon a stranger puzzled him. That Alyth thought her remarks significant was evident, for his brows lowered for a moment ominously. His glance at St. Claire was a swift one, instantly controlled.

"Your memory for faces is remarkable, mademoiselle," he returned, then, equably.

"*Oh que, non!*" she declared. "Usually I am *distract*,—but madame was *remarquable*—she would be noticed anywhere." She was demure now, and slightly shrugging, carrying off well the air of a Frenchwoman that Janniss had seen her assume before.

Alyth was about to answer when they were interrupted by Myra's entrance. Her change of toilette must have been as swift as an impersonator's, possibly be-

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cause the columnar thing she wore was apparently as easy to don as a child's slip, its severity being relieved only by a clinging gossamer of silver. She wore no jewels or ornament of any kind, except in her hair. Its soft abundance looked as if a hurried hand had swept it from her forehead, then let it fall in light waves on either side of her face, its thick coil held in place by a silver spear. Alyth, in his intent survey, observed that she was even more slender than as he remembered her; in exquisite tinting and delicate curves an arresting woman. There was no longer anything girlish about her.

But it was her expression that had changed most. As she bent to take Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's hand, oblivious so far of his presence, Alyth absorbed her new aspect. Her most pronounced expression was of immobility. Her very perfect features with their delicate regularity lent themselves easily to carven stillness; her soft, deeply curved mouth most of all. Her eyes even had changed; the lids drooped more. It was only when she lifted and met his eyes that hers widened, and Alyth saw the old questioning spirit leap up in them.

"They didn't tell me you were here!" she said as she offered her hand. "I am very glad to see you again." When she turned to make her apology to the group her color had deepened. "I am sorry to be late—the streets are so bad we were forced to come slowly."

"I was afraid you'd had an accident," her father said. "Justin declared you were safe, but I was getting regularly fidgety."

"I thought you were too sensible to spoil a good dinner by nervousness," Myra returned, in the smoothly spoken way that Alyth remembered he had at one time thought sarcastic and had discovered was a cover for excitement or mental disturbance of some sort. "I told Nicole I would make the announcement. Shall we go in?"

Alyth hoped that he might be seated beside her, and

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was disappointed. Her father was seated at her right, Alyth's place being between him and Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice. Janniss was at Myra's left, and St. Claire between Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice and Adele Courland. Myra evidently did not want to talk to him at table, for she allowed first Milenberg, then Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, to monopolize him. She was a skilful hostess, however, for when Milenberg, who, as usual, plunged into business, held him too long, she drew him into conversation with Janniss, and started Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice on a subject upon which she was interesting—the early history of the city when the Mississippi built up fortunes for the river-men. She had things to say of the days when the aristocracy of the city summered—not in Europe—but on the heights above the river, and from their wide verandas watched the heat shimmer over the blue line of Illinois shore; when the huge city cemeteries were not, and youth and fashion rode gaily along Bellefontaine Road. She was a child of twelve when the war broke, and a wife during the early days of reconstruction.

Alyth was as much entertained by the little old lady's personality as by her conversation. She was affectedly French, with the evident intent to appear an Americanized Frenchwoman. The truth was that by ancestry she was a deal more Irish than French, a fact that she did not advertise. She was nearing seventy, little and thin, small-featured, and with a complexion that by some French miracle was fresh-colored and without wrinkles. Her glittering gown was as demonstrative of the fewest number of yards in which the human figure may be sheathed as Myra's or Adele Courland's, the diamond-dusted aigrette that nodded amid her white hair a saucy defiance flung at age. Her back was as straight and her head as erect as St. Claire's.

She told Alyth that she had lived over half a century in St. Louis. She did not need to tell him that she had



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been a personage in this city of her birth. Of late years she had lived in New York and Paris, declaring, as she did now to Alyth, that her home city had become so *déclassé* that she could no longer endure more than a month's visit with her cousins St. Claire.

"If I must advance—or retrograde—with the times, I prefer to do it where the movement is as rapid as possible—in New York. My stay in Paris each year is simply to get the breath of American steam-engine activity out of my nostrils for a time."

"I have heard of your salon—on Riverside Drive," Alyth said, with one of his vivid glances in which lurked the imp of mischief.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's hands came up. "Salon! *À Dieu ne plaise!* . . . So that is what they say of me, is it, because I have held a few little symposiums on 'progress'? . . . You see, the world is now so crowded with beings longing for self-expression. Every one is an individualistic individual. Ordinarily I dine, go to the theater, and sup, I luncheon and whist, like any other conservative; but occasionally I bring together some of these many self-expressionists who crowd the world that they may unfold their individual individualistics. When I think of my grandmothers! Turned out of the same little molds, and the molds set away to be used again for their daughters! . . . Tell me, my friend, do you trot?" She studied him brightly over the play of her iridescent fan.

"No; though the thing pulls at me. So far I have only watched the genuflexions at Bustanoby's—and elsewhere."

"So have the rest of us—and have taken lessons on the sly. Whist is becoming intolerable. What is it—the itching in our brains creeping into our feet?"

"Possibly. I've watched the indications. We have overcrowded ourselves with ideas, sent our brains madly

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adventuring, while endeavoring to bring our bodies to the height of animal perfection. We are all alike looking for an emotional outlet—we are ready for a debauch, an eruption of the savage. Next season, nineteen hundred and thirteen, will show us.”

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice’s eyes twinkled; this man pleased her. “You are, of course, a feminist, *mon ami?*”

“No; I am a geologist,” Alyth replied, his eyes laughing with the laughter in hers.

She made a moue. “Ugh! You are all alike, of the stone age—you men. . . . Take, for example, my dear cousin Justin, who by skilful gilding has made the stone of his composition appear a malleable metal. He has persuaded the world and himself that he is progressive. But all his vision has succeeded in grasping is the present-day urge to financial altitude. Think of Justin, with the family he has behind him, competing with these *nouveau riche!* Who ever heard of these people out here in Woodmansie Place? What do you suppose built this house? Biscuits! Crackers! And Justin, if you please, turns his back on his father’s home and buys it. He was in too much of a hurry even to build for himself. He is convinced that he is marching in quick-step with the times. *But*”—and she enforced her point by the pressure of her bony forefinger on Alyth’s arm—“just scratch Justin, and it will be his grandfather you will find! . . . I’m a bit skeptical, of course, one encounters so many throw-backs to Eve, still I am inclined to think it is women who are fashioning themselves whole out of new material. Take our little hostess, for instance; she is in the making.” She nodded decidedly, the look she gave Alyth grown suddenly keen. “We shall see what we shall see!” When much in earnest Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice lost her French air.

Alyth would have argued the point with her for the sake of hearing more of Myra, had not a manœuver of

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Janniss's brought Milenberg and business upon him again. Myra had evidently gathered what was being said, and had kept her father's attention engaged, but now Janniss, who was evidently assisting her, utilized Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's pause to take Adele Courland from St. Claire. St. Claire turned immediately to Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, and Myra was free to lean back in her seat. Janniss had probably observed, as Alyth had, that she looked very tired. Her delicate color had faded; there were blue shadows beneath her eyes, and her mouth drooped. Except for her wide, indifferent glance that did not seem to see, she gave no recognition to the faint sneer and the smoldering look that Adele bestowed upon Janniss, in repayment evidently for an unwelcome interruption.

"Oh no, Mr. Janniss! The modern romance runs thus: heroically discard the impecunious suitor in favor of the man of advantages. Then have an affair of the heart with the discarded one. Divorce then the man of advantages and marry the man of one's heart—but first secure a substantial settlement."

Just what Janniss had said to call forth the retort Alyth had not heard. Alyth was receiving a set of impressions that he would ponder later. He was wondering just then what Myra was thinking as her slow gaze traveled around the table and rested in an expressionless way upon her husband, and then upon the strange woman at his side. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's eyes had also frequently rested on them. Certainly in both appearance and deportment Adele Courland riveted attention. She may at one time have been St. Claire's ward; she could not be now, for she was certainly twenty-eight or thirty. She was extraordinarily thin, and with a mouth so vividly red that it was like a wound in white flesh. White she was to the point of pallor, and crowned with blue-black hair. Intense as was the contrast, it was dominated by her eyes. Immense, black and brilliant, and set beneath



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a broad sweep of black brows, they were astonishing. They looked as if a craving, imprisoned woman, the more vital for being attenuated, was ready to spring out of their depths. She was swathed in red shot with gold, a gown without girdle that flexed with every turn, its glitter enhancing the impression of a mere sheath to rippling movement. She sat most of the time with elbow on the table, the attitude of the confirmed restaurant-frequenter, and, when talking to St. Claire, bent close, and with gaze only for him. The moment she could turn from Janniss she again claimed St. Claire.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice shrugged slightly as she turned back to Alyth, but though the glance she gave him sparkled with meaning, she refrained from remark. Possibly it was irritation, or amusement, or both, that made her ask Milenberg what he thought of the militant movement. When the millionaire dryly recommended marriage as a cure, she executed one of the mental somersaults to which she appeared to be subject, and questioned him sweetly on "lobbying" as a regular political procedure.

Milenberg took the cigar from his lips and fixed her with his steel-pointed gaze. "I don't know much about it from personal experience," he said, equably. "I never had it practised on me, but a friend of mine out West had. In his state a party of ladies went up to the legislature to get a clause, or something or other, incorporated into a bill. But they didn't have much success—though the ladies did argue a good deal. . . . Well, one evening my friend came out of his room in the hotel and met one of the ladies in the hall—the ladies were put up at the same hotel as the legislators—and she was sidling along, looking distressed. Of course he stopped to ask what was the matter, and finally, after some parleying and eyelash work, she confessed that there were four hooks at the very top of her waist that she couldn't reach—'bodice,' he said she called it—and none of the ladies

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were about to help her. She was little, and had big blue eyes, he said, the only pretty one of the lot. He told her he was good at that sort of thing—always did it for his wife—and so she turned shyly around, and my friend set to work. He said they were the most complicated hooks he had ever come across, and just how it happened he didn't know, but by the time he had finished he'd promised his vote. He kept still about it, though. . . . Well, when the bill came up the ladies won out—to the surprise of everybody—and then the lawmakers began to compare notes and found that every one of them had helped to fasten up that 'bodice.' . . . As I say, I've had no personal experience, but I should call that 'lobbying.'" Milenberg flashed a glance at his son-in-law and put his cigar back between his lips.

In the general laughter even Myra lost her look of weariness. Though aroused, she did not laugh, the swift look she cast upon her father, and then on her husband, being as devoid of mirth as the glance Milenberg had exchanged with St. Claire. St. Claire was rallying Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, and under cover of his teasing and her repartees Myra talked to Janniss, low and earnestly. Janniss's steadfast look absorbed her, for with the color warm in her cheeks, and her eyes wide and questioning, she was very beautiful. At St. Claire's request they were having coffee in the dining-room, and Myra, who had lighted her cigarette with the rest, was, in the interest of her talk with Janniss, allowing it to die between her fingers.

Alyth sat observant through it all. Myra had scarcely a word for him, and when they returned to the drawing-room, and she seated herself beside Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, Alyth's disappointment deepened into actual hurt. He wanted intensely to talk with her; his desire had grown with every moment that had passed. This was a woman to be discovered anew. She had left the girl he remem-

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bered far behind. It was plain, however, that she meant to avoid him, so it was with relief Alyth found that Milenberg had an appointment down-town. It was St. Claire who told him.

"I ought to go, too," St. Claire said, "but for once I mean to cut a business meeting—it's only the fourth this week!" and he shrugged in well-assumed disgust.

Alyth's quick wits enlightened him. "I'll not furnish you with an excuse," he returned, promptly. "I have been wondering if one of you would not be going into the city, and would take me along." It had occurred to Alyth suddenly that St. Claire meant he should not talk with his wife. It was he who had suggested their having coffee at table, and had kept them as long as possible in the dining-room. In swallowing his dislike of St. Claire and entering his house he had shown his interest too plainly. Justin St. Claire was always on his guard; it was his old distrust revived; it could hardly be jealousy. The way in which St. Claire had covered his wish to speed the parting guest was so like him.

Myra's parting, like her greeting, was a simple one, quietly spoken: "I am glad to have seen you. I am glad you came."

It was Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice who was cordial. "I go from here direct to Paris, but next winter you are coming to see me in New York, are you not? I shall be at home in December, as usual. You will find me a good hostess, and an even better friend."

Alyth promised; he liked the sparkling little woman. He took his thoughts back with him then to his hotel, and smoked over them. Something of a mess that was he had left behind him! Alyth had friends in the city—he had acquaintances everywhere—but he was in no mood for society. Dissatisfaction had its grip on him, and without reason, Milenberg would have argued, for George Alyth had been very successful in the last two years. He



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was a recognized authority now, almost as well known in Europe as in America, for his South American operations had brought him into prominent notice. And he had made money for himself as well as for others. He was investing now in sections of the West that in time would make him a wealthy man.

Alyth was too successful and too absorbed to harbor dissatisfaction frequently; every energy he possessed was concentrated upon his profession. It was only when he thought of his household in Manor Park Place that the deadening sense of futility took hold on him, for he had followed the line of least resistance, taken the middle course. He had a home and he had it not, and on the occasions when discontent gripped him he paraphrased the biblical quotation: "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world—and have no satisfaction in his home?" The sight of Myra Milenberg had brought back the days of alternate disgust and conscientious endeavor.

The telephone broke in on his thoughts. He was surprised, for aside from Milenberg and St. Claire there was no one who knew where he was stopping. For one moment he did not know the woman's voice:

"Mr. Alyth?"

"Yes. . . . Mrs. St. Claire?"

She lacked somewhat of her usual poise. "Yes, it is I. I—I didn't realize that I should not see you again—" Then she caught herself up and spoke with all of her old directness. "I was about to prevaricate—forgive me. . . . When you were here I felt I did not want to talk about—about New Rome. You were no sooner gone than I wanted to do that very thing. That is like a woman, isn't it? It is characteristic of me these days—certainly. . . . I hope you are not going to-morrow—not before you have come to see me, at any rate?"

Alyth's surprise made him even more succinct than

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usual. "I have engagements until three in the afternoon."

"And after that?"

"I can come."

"Between four and five—?"

"Yes."

"I am glad," she said, with a note of relief. "Good-by."

Alyth had mechanically hung up the receiver before it occurred to him that he had not been at all gracious. But he had been so completely surprised.

## CHAPTER X

ALYTH was shown into what was evidently Myra's study, a room over the portico. When Nicole left him in a place that was expressive of Myra he felt a sense of relief; St. Claire's intrusive presence receded. For this room was in somewhat striking contrast to the ostentatious elegance, the *endimanché* effect of the rest of the house. This was a livable place. The walls were wainscoted with bookshelves; there were a few good water-colors about, and a number of Myra's own sketches that showed at least an aptitude for drawing, her characteristic impression of warmth and color being supplied by the deeply cushioned couch before the fire and several rich rugs.

Her choice of books interested Alyth. There were numerous old and new friends of his on the shelves, and piles of magazines; but the books that were scattered about as if recently perused were mostly of one nature, gospels of woman's freedom, her recent intellectual output. On a shelf near the fire Alyth noticed sets of George Eliot, George Sand, and a life of Mary Wollstonecraft, and sandwiched between them several volumes of Ellen Key, and Olive Schreiner's latest contribution. From the window-seat he picked up *The Man-Made World*, and was smiling at a penciled comment, "Cold sense," when Myra came in.

He called her attention to it. "You as well as Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice?" he asked, lightly. What he was thinking was that she was glad to see him; she left him



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in no doubt as to that; both her look and her flush told him so.

She sheered from the subject as if shy of discussion. "Yes. . . . Have you ever seen just this view of the city?"

As Alyth was at the window when she came in, her question was not too abrupt. He had been looking at the city, its myriad roofs, its spires, and its domes. The university towers marked the westernmost gateway; the eastern reaches were lost in the smoke-cloud that hung above the city's densest activity. Backgrounded by a murky shroud, the great snowy dome of the new cathedral stood out distinct.

"The city looks a huge octopus with tentacles stretched westward, always westward."

"Yes, and the sight of it tires rather than rests me," Myra said. "I like it better at night when there are simply the lights."

She looked weary enough; daylight revealed much the candle-light had hidden. She was changed, startlingly so. A certain restrained vigor that had marked her as a girl was gone. Her voice was less clear, lower-pitched. She was thinner, graver, stiller—as if she had not completely recovered from an illness. Yet there was a something about her that appealed to Alyth in a way that her abounding youth with its eager demands had not.

"You are changed. Are you well?" he asked, in his usual unadorned way. Why play at formality? They had once shown each other their thoughts too plainly for that.

"I am tired to-day," she returned, quietly. "I am not at all suited for the way in which we live. I am learning what a wearing thing it must be to a man to toil in a profession he dislikes. I toil over society, and very successfully—I suppose because I am my father's daughter—but my heart is not in what I am doing." Her lips smiled at him, her eyes saying other things.

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Alyth realized that he was talking to maturity now—a woman who knew how to guard her tongue. There had probably been more of impulse in her telephone message than she would show in their interview. She had struggled against her desire to see him, and had finally yielded; there was certainly something she wanted of him.

"You should not be standing, then," he said.

They went to the fire, and she allowed him to place pillows for her. He remained standing, for with the rare tact that permits a man to shift for himself and as pleases him she made no suggestions.

"The season has been a long one," she continued, "and to us Lent brings very little rest. The last year has been one long strain. Throughout the summer, except for a month with my mother, I was busied over this house, getting it ready for the autumn."

"How is Mrs. Milenberg?" Alyth asked. "I didn't know, until Janniss told me, that she was in New York."

"Mother is as usual. I hope you will go to see her. I am afraid she is very lonely sometimes, in a city where she knows no one. In sixteen months I have seen my mother only once. I should not have thought that possible." She had good control over her features, but her voice betrayed her; it was vibrant. Alyth had thought the night before that she looked wretched; he was very sure of it now.

"I shall be glad to go," he promised. "Your father tells me he is here a great deal now."

"Yes. . . . It seems that Justin is doing what he has wanted to do for years—give all his time to finance—and he and father appear to work together to mutual advantage. It was a great—surprise to me, the discovery that Justin was as eager for money-making as father—just as determined to push to the front. All this social effort, this house and its flunkysim, is part of the general scheme."

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There was plenty of quiet scorn edging her words. Under all her poise there still burned the old spirit, and Alyth was glad that she had not lost it; it had appeared so thoroughly a part of her. Disillusion had evidently left her with a wound that she shrank from revealing, though the ache of it showed in her voice and her eyes.

"I hear on all sides that your husband is very successful." Alyth was sorry that she felt it necessary to talk around the thing, whatever it was, that she wanted to reach. He was simply following her lead.

"Justin is living the life that pleases him best. He has always craved an—establishment. He delights in society, perhaps because he is so wonderfully suited to its demands." If her characterization was an arraignment, it was very quietly done. She spoke in a detached enough way.

Alyth became a little more personal. "And I judge that you have been rapidly collecting the pieces to your patchwork quilt," he remarked, smilingly.

"Yes, but stupidly, without any pattern planned, and no color scheme."

His look grew as grave as hers. "And I am doing no better."

"Are you not?"

"No."

"I hoped that you were. . . . I told you once that I had an amount of wretched knowledge that troubled me. During these last sixteen months, when I have been out in the world as it were, and forced more than ever to do my own thinking, I have been putting some questions to myself. They have always been in my mind, really. Most of my acquaintances are married, and about many of them I am forced to ask: What possible significance can the coming together of two people have, if there is no mutual ideal? If their conception of marriage differs, is their union anything but a farce? Is not their continued



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union really something worse than that—one of the things our thoughts do not like to touch—a thing without an atom of respect to grace it? My observation has led me to feel that without the fundamental necessity of *oneness* marriage is not a process of building up, but of disintegration.” Though perfectly controlled, she was tense enough now. Like her father, she never fidgeted, so her hands lay in her lap, but Alyth saw that they were tightly pressed.

His tanned face had darkened. “You have traveled far in a short time.”

“Are my questions irrational?”

“I asked them of myself day in and day out—for years.”

Myra straightened abruptly. “Yes—and what have you *done*?”

Alyth knew now what she wanted. He had proffered her his experience once; she was casting about for guidance. Things were worse with her than he had thought.

“I have *done* nothing,” he answered, steadily—“nothing but compromise with my convictions. I believe in the single union, in husband and wife holding together, in mutual forbearance, in the home conserved. I believe it is the only solution, the only firm foundation upon which we at this stage of our development can build. I believe it. However far afield my thoughts and my desires wander, I always return to that conviction. And yet, coerced by circumstances, driven by the demands of my own individuality, I have compromised with my convictions. Caroline is adamant in her determination that outwardly the family be kept together, and principally for monetary reasons. To her marriage is largely an economic contract. And as marriage is arranged at present she is right. But I cannot conform to her ideals—or rather to her lack of them. I have tried hard. I *cannot*. So we are strangers, she and I; the same roof covers us, that’s all, I do what I can for my children;

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possibly when they are older I can do more; I simply cannot give them up utterly to their mother's training. . . . My quarrel with things as they are is this: The half of us *marry wrongly*—without a particle of sense, ignorantly or sordidly, as you say, without 'mutual ideals,' without any 'oneness of conception.' I sympathize with those in whom the yeast of new demands is fomenting—the demands that men and women shall be equals, and be judged as equals; that there should be an economic adjustment making such a thing possible; that husband and wife should be mates, mentally, physically; that they should come together with the same ideals and live to them, and, if they cannot, they should be helped by the law to part and seek further for their complements. . . . And yet, at the same time that I itch with this epidemic of individualism, I see its dangers. The conservative side of my brain points out that the adjustment has *not* yet been made—conditions *are* what they are; that when we come to an *acting* basis we judge and are judged by the time-honored standards." Alyth shrugged, impatiently. "And as a result, what do I do? Nothing. . . . I compromise with my convictions, live as many of us are living—at sixes and sevens!"

As Myra looked at him and listened, watching the swift changes of expression that crossed his lean, dark face, kindled now by eagerness, swept again by disgust, or made tight-lipped by coldness, she thought how little he had changed. His was not a nature to welcome innovations; rearing had its strong grip on him. The thought came and passed. He had given her no help, and her flush of eagerness faded.

"You are doing probably, to the best of your ability, the thing that seems to you right—as are others," she said, slowly. "With you it may be the impossibility of intimate contact with a sordid nature. With another it may be detestation of a hypocrisy so subtle that it amounts

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almost to genius. To live side by side with a gilded lie is horrible. . . . Yet both are grievances that in the old order were considered unjustifiable; there has been no provision made for such trifles. And the old order constrains us still—those of us who are conscientious. We hesitate, we reproach ourselves, we want intensely to do what is right—and end by compromising with our convictions.” She spoke lifelessly, colorlessly.

Alyth was silent. She had told him everything, and yet nothing. He understood; she was enveloped by the huge fabrication that was Justin St. Claire, and was smothering—a consequence natural to an open nature.

He refrained from showing her how completely he understood, for of what use would it be? He had just proved his inability to either advise or assist.

But he was intensely sorry for her. The fears he had had in New Rome were realized. With her father and St. Claire both against her, and without any tangible grievance as the world would see it, what chance was there for her to come out of it all? She would either wear herself out with dissatisfaction and fall back upon a deadening indifference, or complete the matrimonial quadrilateral—turn to St. Claire’s antithesis. At the club it had occurred to Alyth that Janniss was interested in St. Claire’s wife; the indications had not gone unnoticed. Later, at dinner, Alyth’s observations led him to think that it was a young man’s infatuation for a woman who was so wrapped in her unhappiness that she was scarcely aware of him. What he was thinking now was that here was plentiful material for a “situation”—St. Claire’s opposite, primed, close at hand.

The thought tormented him, and though he sat with Myra until the room darkened, he received no reassurance. Urged by his discomfort, Alyth introduced Janniss’s name, with only the doubtful satisfaction of seeing her face brighten.



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"Think of possessing a talent such as his! It is not worship of money that urges him to success. . . . Any more than with you." Her glance and her smile were for Alyth now. She looked and spoke more like the girl of New Rome, intense in appreciation as in denunciation.

Alyth smiled at her even while he warned, "But there is no creature more utterly selfish than the creative genius."

"More so, you think, than the financial genius?" she objected. "That is not possible."

As usual, she was expressing her unalterable opinion of her father. Then, as if determined to get away from things personal and painful, she turned to other subjects, and showed herself wholly charming. She was a beautiful and intelligent woman, her cleverness touched by the spirited deference that captivates masculine conceit. It was no affectation, that attitude of hers; it was simply a part of her charm of manner. Disturbed though he was, possibly because he was disturbed, Alyth felt keenly her attraction. He took a quick pleasure in analyzing her. A woman such as she deprived of happiness! The pity of it!

When St. Claire came in he found Alyth still before the fire. "Why—Alyth! . . . I am glad to see you!" he said. "I wasn't certain in this light. I thought, of course, it was Janniss. I have been thinking of you as on your way to New York." He bent to kiss Myra, then sat down beside her, his hand still on her shoulder.

Few would have noticed anything but his usual cordiality in St. Claire's manner; but to Myra, as to Alyth, his greeting rang hollow. Myra stiffened under his caress, her eyes dilating. Why the remark about Janniss? It was with purpose. Myra had the sickening conviction that her husband rarely spoke or acted without purpose.

Alyth had also noted the intimation. "No, I go to-

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night," he said, briefly. He gave no explanation of his presence, for his always active dislike of St. Claire was intense at that moment. He had seen the nervous widening of Myra's eyes; it was something more acute than indifference, that shrinking of hers from her husband.

"You will stay for dinner?" St. Claire said. "We are dining early this evening, are we not, dear—because of the theater?"

Alyth reflected that St. Claire knew well how to word a dismissal. "Thank you, but my train leaves too early," he replied.

Myra had not seconded the invitation. Her eyes rested for a moment on her husband, the same expressionless observation she had given him during dinner the evening before. When Alyth rose she thanked him for coming, the ring of sincerity in every word she uttered. "It was very good of you to spare me part of a busy afternoon. You will not forget to call upon mother? She will be so pleased to see you."

Alyth promised and departed. As Nicole bowed him out into the portico he reflected grimly that that night on the hillside he had foreseen some such situation. It was a great pity. There was so much that was lovable about her. Sincerity and sweetness. There was nothing petty in her composition; it was like her to champion that black-and-white woman who had eyes only for her husband, and too much temperament to hide the fact. . . . And if Myra St. Claire loved again it would be generously—she could do no otherwise. . . . Think of possessing a wife like that! St. Claire was a clever—fool.

## CHAPTER XI

WHEN the door closed on Alyth and they were alone, St. Claire left his wife's side and stood before the fire, and Myra looked at the fire and not at him. The increasingly accurate reading of her husband, that was a hurt each time renewed, told her that he had some proposal to make, the real object of which he would endeavor to conceal from her. Life with him had come to mean a series of these purposes to which she listened with lowered eyes and apparently with only sufficient intelligence to unquestioningly accede, playing the wife's part as Justin St. Claire conceived of it—his the dominating brain, hers the passively acquiescent.

Myra's understanding of her husband had come appallingly soon. It was not long after their marriage that the utter incompatibility of their conceptions had broken upon her. Their honeymoon, which to St. Claire was a period of mere emotional intensity, restrained to some extent by consideration for her youth, had to Myra been the initiation into one of life's great mysteries, one of the knowledges so fraught with awe as well as with emotion that happiness had stood aside for a time. Happiness had come later, when St. Claire first brought her to the old St. Claire home, while his gallantry still persisted, before the nature of the man revealed itself. To Myra this had been a time of dreams, of tender love for her husband, of huge pride in the family to which she wanted to bear a son, another St. Claire.

Myra had been so exquisitely beautiful in her happi-



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ness that society had gone mad over her, even its small soul touched by the dream-widened eyes of a girl. In the series of ovations it offered St. Claire and his bride it had a shrewd eye cocked to the future. With a large access in fortune St. Claire was bound to stand foremost; society had hastened to kiss his bride's hand. Then because of that look in her eyes it was touched, a bit softened, genuinely admiring.

Myra had remained wrapped in her dreams until a certain observation was forced upon her, the entering wedge of reality. In marriages preordained to disunion the first note of discord is almost invariably struck on the physical keyboard, possibly because it is the instrument most played upon. So to Myra it became plain that what her husband increasingly demanded of her was not tenderness, an opening of her heart to him, but excitement; that he was either excited or anxious most of the time. The rushing, consuming life upon which they were launched, that made the intimacies of marriage snatched moments of excitation rather than of joy, met with his approval. At times he shamed and puzzled her. His chivalry had faded. She shrank from his determined call upon the purely sensuous—upon that and nothing more. With Myra the great "*want*," the recognition of an inadequacy, that makes marital relations a misery, asserted itself early. With his skill in parrying St. Claire had pointed out to Myra the unwisdom of her entering upon motherhood too soon. But with the desire to expend tenderness increasing in her, Myra's mind hung upon the subject. She wanted a child.

And the fuller disillusionment that left her terrified and numb was brought about by the twofold discovery that her husband had much the same ambitions and ideals as her father, and that he had no desire for home-building, no wish for children. It was her father's frequent visits, and the indications of an understanding between him and

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her husband, that, disquieted as Myra already was, had driven her to questioning and pleading.

The occasion was the end of the season, only four months after their marriage. Myra pleaded for what had been her conception of their life together—as she had defined it to St. Claire when she had given him her promise.

“Let us live more quietly, Justin, so we can have a child,” she begged. “I know in your heart you must want it—a real home, and not this mere living for the public. Life will be ruined for us in the end, if we go on as we are. You are anxious and excited from day’s end to day’s end.”

Myra was frightened enough to persist in her pleading, and St. Claire had finally been forced to speak the truth, to uncover plans he had kept to himself: he did not want children; he wanted her as she was, with beauty unmarred. He had revealed then his ambitions—he had practically bought the Courtney house in Woodmansie Place.

“There you will be supreme,” he said. “*I mean that we shall lead—you socially, and I financially.*”

Myra had looked at him aghast. “But—Justin—you mean—to go on living in this way always—only more so—a huge house and no children! . . . I couldn’t do it.”

He was firm. She must adapt herself; the men in his family had never been ruled by their women. “I think you love me enough to do what will further my interests.”

“You didn’t tell me these things before we were married.” She had grown dead white under the blow; it had come to her overwhelmingly that she had been deceived—played upon.

St. Claire carried it off with a high hand. She loved him; she was an impassioned woman. He had no intention of coming off second in their first quarrel.

“It was not necessary. You were not old enough, or

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experienced enough, to know what you were talking about. I thought you loved me. If a woman loves her husband that is sufficient for her. He is the head of his house; he is the provider. The right of decision in matters relating to the big interests of his family necessarily rests with him. The woman's part is to care for the home her husband provides, and to defer to his judgment." St. Claire had the air of hectoring a child, for so she appeared to him in her whole-hearted affection—and her ridiculous notions. He had not expected them to persist after marriage and in a changed environment.

"Father's idea," Myra said, numbly. "Not a partnership, no real comradeship. And how does it work out? From the time I was a little girl I watched how it was with father and mother. . . . Justin, you are all *wrong*. We cannot be ruled only by ambition and be happy! Do you want to kill happiness, Justin?"

Fear had given edge to Myra's protest, for it was a fundamental requirement of her being she was guarding. St. Claire had roused a dread that had grown up with her; struck at a conviction cemented by experience. An impression received in childhood can never be eradicated. Even if not kept active by added experience, it remains a subconscious impression ready to spring into life. Her love would die under such a future. And her love was a thing that could not be coerced. . . . And such a conception of her! "You are a baby with notions," her father had said. To her husband she was also "a baby with notions." He had pretended to her as one does with a child. He considered women as little more than overgrown children; children with the sex asset.

Myra had been pallid and voiceless under his attempts to warm her into forgetfulness. Then, when the determination to conquer in his own fashion made him imperative, she was shocked anew.

"Do you mean this to be a permanent break between



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us?" he demanded. "If you turn me away to-night you will regret it."

Myra had grasped his meaning. The future was on her with a rush, and before it she faltered. She had vested her all—given all of herself into his keeping, and in that moment of stress her mother's precepts were written large upon her consciousness, dimming her own immature scrawl—the necessity of clinging to the man who possessed her, of keeping intact the home at any price.

But happiness had lain cold and with face covered, and in the weeks and months that followed it did not come to life. Myra had dragged through her social duties that spring, sick at heart and ill in body, for she was not a stupid woman, and each day was a little further unfolding of the man she had married. There gradually developed in her an almost abnormal acuteness in sensing his motives, in reading his thoughts. Her husband was fundamentally insincere. He was *real* only when off his guard, and at such times he impressed her as unlovely. When he loosed his hold on restraint he shocked her. The mixture of motives that had led him to marry her were made increasingly plain.

In time Myra braced herself for the rôle required of her, but mechanically, for she was thinking, self-questioning, considering. There was in Myra the thing that is growingly noticeable in the girl of to-day—the desire to solve her problem assisted by her intelligence and not by her feelings. She had made the great mistake—and what now? As she had said to Alyth, she wished intensely to do what was *right*. She read as well as thought during those months of catering to her husband's ambition, and of inwardly shrinking, outwardly passive, submission to his demands. There was one thing she could not and would not do—quarrel.

Karl Janniss, with his urge to create, his contempt for

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the sordid, his feeling for the beautiful, and his eager wish to please her, had been the one refreshing interlude in months crowded with painful experiences. With never an encroachment, he had shown her that he understood. He had watched the courtship in New Rome; he had fathomed her husband. Myra knew well that Janniss had an artist's appreciation of her beauty, but it was not that knowledge that attracted her to him. It was the boy in him, a certain ingenuousness, a lovable quality that appealed to the thing in her that her husband had buffeted and was now starving, the thing that a woman often expends upon her husband quite as much as upon her child—her motherhood. And yet Karl Janniss was all of a man, with his squared shoulders and his determined chin and his vast capacity for work.

To society Myra appeared to have changed with astonishing rapidity into a coolly ambitious woman. The dreamlight had left her eyes so soon. She had grown immobile, and so business-like in the manipulation of her social advantages that she was bitterly criticized, and in an equal degree deferred to and fawned upon. The removal to Woodmansie Place was laid at her door. She was her father's daughter; she must have a palace or two, of course. Secured by her father's money, and with her husband's social prestige to push her, she evidently meant to sit on the topmost rung of the social ladder. Justin St. Claire was ambitious—everybody knew that—but left to himself, he would have had better taste; the St. Claires had always been so conservative. Had Myra meddled with any of their menkind she would have been actively hated, but women judged her too politic for that. Still, the fact that men in general were impressed by her beauty and her temperamental warmth, rather than by her cleverness, made her unloved by women. Myra knew that she was misjudged, but what did it matter? She was too unhappy to care. Her thoughts

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were either turned inward or disgustedly busied with her husband's somewhat complicated psychology.

And as Myra sat now looking into the fire, with her husband standing over her, she guessed wearily that before making his proposal, whatever it might be, he would endeavor to smooth over his dismissal of Alyth. For some reason he hated Alyth. There was no theater engagement; that had been one of St. Claire's swift improvisations. Myra had judged so correctly that when the confirmation came it made her wince.

"They were saying at the Mid-Day Club that 'A Modern Pericles' is worth seeing. I thought you would like to go."

Myra knew shrinkingly that this was also an improvisation. "Will you go?" she asked, quietly.

"No, I have a meeting. You and Adele could go. Janniss can take you."

"I think I prefer an evening at home."

St. Claire dropped the subject, as she knew he would. He was silent for a moment, then led up to his proposal. "Did Adele have her last sitting to-day?"

"I believe so."

So it was something further about the woman she had taken into his house and had chaperoned throughout the season.

"Janniss will be off to New York, then, of course. I have to go too—I'll have business that will keep me there for a week or ten days, and then I must go on to Washington. How would you and Adele like to go with me for that week?"

Myra did not answer at once. There were disagreeable things said about this sister-in-law of St. Claire's. She was wealthy, and until she came of age St. Claire had been her guardian. She had been eccentric, even as a young girl a lover of men, and always with some adventurer in her train. Women she openly abominated.



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It was supposed that the family tendency to insanity had kept her from marrying; at any rate, she had not married, though her love-affairs had been numerous. After coming into her property she had for several years shocked society by her mad flirtations until she had been all but ostracized. Then she had gone to Paris to live, and occasionally outrageous stories, with, of course, only a modicum of truth as a foundation, had reached her home city. In an impatient, half-disgusted way Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had always stood her friend.

"Bah!" she was in the habit of exclaiming. "The only difference between Adele and some of her detractors is that she is insane enough to say and do openly what they think and do *à huis clos*. . . . Leave the child alone. She has a big enough enemy to fight in herself."

To the surprise of every one, at the beginning of the season Adele Courland had suddenly returned to St. Louis, and upon her announcement that she intended to remain indefinitely the St. Claires had made it apparent that they meant to see her through. For part of the winter she had been their guest. It was, of course, remembered then that she had always been infatuated with Justin St. Claire, and tongues wagged. If the gossip reached Myra she showed no sign. Even when Adele, as at dinner the night before, recklessly showed her preference, Myra did not vary from her imperviously polite attitude. In the weeks of Adele's visit there had never once been an intimacy between Myra and her visitor, or, on the other hand, a single word of disagreement. Myra had been born with the art of tactful inaccessibility. In an expressionless way she was studying still another phase of her husband's character.

St. Claire had expressed utter disgust at his sister-in-law's sudden appearance, and to Myra's sharpened understanding an excitement that he hid well.

"Of all the nuisances!" he exclaimed. "She will get

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cold-shouldered everywhere. What in the world is she thinking of! It's one of her mad freaks, of course. She has been an endless bother to me. . . . Still, since she is here and bound to stay, we shall have to do what we can for her. She is a relation; in a way I feel that I am her guardian yet. We will have to see her through. We shall have to ask her here," and Myra had acquiesced, as she did to every request he made.

But Myra had considered Adele Courland from all sides, and for some time she had realized that there was only one course possible. She answered finally, "The better thing would be to persuade Adele to go back to Paris."

St. Claire glanced at her, a scarcely perceptible pause, during which his face lost expression. "Why?"

Myra did not look up. She kept on steadily, though her hands grew cold from distaste of the subject. "Your experiment is not working out—Adele cares nothing for Janniss. And for several reasons—for her own sake—she will be better off in Paris."

"Why—better off in Paris?" he persisted. It was surprising that she had perceived so clearly a motive of his; but that was not all her quiet remarks conveyed.

"Adele is infatuated with you, Justin. She has been so for years. You have known it, and others have known and commented on it. This is not the place for her; you should never have let her come here."

St. Claire flushed crimson. He could not accustom himself to her clean directness. It was being gradually borne in upon him that he had married a woman who possessed a little of her father's cleverness. He had always considered cool-headedness as the rarest of feminine qualities. He was much too observant not to have noticed certain changes in his wife: that she had lost all her girlish enthusiasm; that she was no longer impassioned; that she was merely passive, and that when she

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could she guarded herself from his demands. She appeared to be absorbed by the management of his house and society. She no longer objected to their living so much for the public that they saw less and less of each other.

They were all changes that had appeared explainable. In the beginning she had taken the shattering of her girlish ideals somewhat tragically; she had been actually ill after their first and only quarrel—until her good sense had come to the rescue—as he had felt sure it would. Then she had matured rapidly and taken on the unemotional attitude toward him that most married women of his acquaintance maintained toward their husbands.

St. Claire was utterly skeptical of lover-like relations between husband and wife. Too many married women had favored him with affection and confidences for him to have retained illusions on that score. The emotional attitude was one that passed, and quickly. The possessive remained, and frequently worked the mischief; but it was *convenance*, economic considerations, or habit that kept the average family together. Myra was naturally a woman of strong feeling; he had not expected the change to be so immediate with her; still, except in his headlong moods, he did not regret the change. He had intended that she should become socially ambitious, and he knew well enough that the socially immersed woman has little time or inclination for love. He had wanted a wife and an establishment, and certainly Myra was filling those requirements admirably. He could adapt himself; he had a man's liberty, and Myra did not appear jealously inclined; St. Claire had been deeply thankful for that. So far she had not shown a particle of jealousy, retrospective or otherwise.

But her present remarks were a bit staggering, since to his conception they could be prompted only by jealousy. St. Claire's answer was instantaneous with his flush.



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"You don't mean you doubt me, Myra?"

"No, I do not doubt you—not as you mean," she said, evenly. "I think you dislike Adele. Certainly you have always made her fondness for you and your indifference clear to everybody. Yet you asked her here as a visitor, and have been charming to her. Then recently you asked Janniss here, and persuaded Adele to have her portrait painted, with the evident intention that she should become infatuated with him. With her unfortunate inheritance you certainly could not expect a man of Janniss's intelligence to marry her. . . . I do not pretend to understand you, Justin—I only know that for some purpose Adele is being manipulated, and it is not right."

Though her answer relieved him somewhat, it was still another surprise. St. Claire did not like the word "manipulated." "You are quite right—I do not like Adele, and I have never liked her," he said, with emphasis; "but you are quite wrong in thinking that I have had any ulterior motives. Heaven knows I have been bothered enough by her silly attachment to me! Adele never considers the public when she is giving herself up to an infatuation, and if her folly has been noticed it is her own fault, not mine. . . . I suggested her coming here because I knew your countenancing her would be the best refutation of gossip. I don't like Adele, but I am sorry for her. It did occur to me that if she and Janniss could care for each other it might be a solution for her. Janniss has nothing, and she has. There have been much more impossible matches made than theirs would be. But I have no thought of '*manipulating*' Adele, Myra. I am sorry you should so utterly misjudge me." He spoke as one deeply hurt.

Myra did not say that she did not believe him; that the more smoothly and convincingly he expressed himself the less inclined she was to believe him. She had said enough. To say what she had had left her trembling.

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She had felt compelled to say it; things could not go on as they were with Adele.

"I do not like the whole situation," was all she allowed herself to say.

"I have not thought much about it," St. Claire declared. "It has always seemed such nonsense, Adele's caring for me, and of course I haven't realized how you felt about it. You must know that with Adele's temperament an infatuation means nothing—nothing at all. In time she will be just as taken with some one else. Women are always being silly over me. It doesn't mean anything to me."

Myra realized that he spoke without any petty conceit. His belief in his power to fascinate was too immense, his conceit too monumental, to be petty. Certainly women had done their best to foster that belief in him. But she did not agree with him regarding Adele. Her infatuation appeared to Myra little short of madness, an unreasoning thing that rebounded from St. Claire's smooth surface without leaving the slightest impression. She remembered the spell he had laid upon herself, and she had often grown hot and cold over her observation of Adele. But the thing that burned her most was the suspicion that her husband was utilizing Adele's feeling for some purpose. When that explanation had occurred to her Myra realized that she had indeed, as Alyth had said, "traveled far in a short time"; her own state of mind toward her husband sickened her.

St. Claire watched her expressionless observation of the fire with well-concealed anxiety. He had a wholesome fear of woman's jealousy, and it occurred to him now that with Myra jealousy would take just this quietly expressed form. It may have had much to do with her changed attitude to him.

"What do you think would be the best way of relieving the situation?" he asked.

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"The only right thing is to be honest with Adele. Convince her that she is foolish and persuade her to go back to Paris."

"Adele is not easy to persuade," he objected. "I want, above all things, to avoid a scene with her. I have counted on this nonsense of hers wearing off. . . . Wouldn't it be best to avoid an explanation—let things come gradually? . . . We will go to New York, you and I, and then Adele will have to fall back upon the Edwin Courlands, and when we return we need not invite her here. She cannot endure life with those two old people long, and particularly through the dull summer. She will go back to Paris of her own choice then."

Myra felt she must accede to the plan. She was drearily conscious that her husband could handle the situation without embarrassment to himself. "I could visit with mother while you go to Washington," she said. It took all her will to keep from weeping, for the thought of seeing her mother made her throat hurt. During those wretched months she had longed for her mother, an ache that would not be stilled. The previous summer, when the realities had assumed ominous importance and she was too miserable to arouse herself, Myra had gone to her mother, clung close to her, and revealed nothing. And now to get away from that huge house that sat upon her like an incubus; to rid herself of Adele's repellent personality; to be relieved of her husband's presence!

Myra set her teeth and gripped her hands in her effort for self-control, for St. Claire had sat down beside her and put his arm about her. She grew so white that her features appeared pinched, depriving her face of beauty. That cold appraisal of a woman that was part of St. Claire's nature told him that in the last months she had gone off in her looks. She looked really ill; jealousy did not agree with her. She was sick with jealousy, and



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too proud to show what was tearing at her. St. Claire had drawn the conclusions natural to him; they had settled somewhat early into the married state that called for little private petting and the necessary public show of affection on his part. She had, of course, laid his omissions at Adele's door.

But he did not let his thoughts affect his manner. "You are not letting little things like a foolishness of Adele's worry you, are you, sweetheart?" he asked, affectionately. "We have fallen into a rut. We'll be off for a second honeymoon."

Myra recognized the suggestion—the usual panacea for all marital complaints. . . . It was not for that she was starving. Was it the women he had known who had given him his unalterable estimate of women? She was experienced enough now to know that her husband had been a man of many loves; not a man restrained under misfortune, with the desire for wife and home always alive in him; the being she had believed him to be—a belief he had fostered.

"No," she said, a little indistinctly, "it is just an accumulation of things. . . . I am tired out." She had stiffened. She kept the palms of her hands pressed together in her lap that he might not, by touching them, discover how cold and moist they were. Her withdrawal was done cautiously. "I can scarcely sit up, I am so tired," she confessed. "I shall lie down before dinner." She submitted to his kiss, then slipped out of his hold.

When she was gone St. Claire rose and walked the floor, as was usual with him when he was thinking. . . . This was a threat of danger from an unexpected quarter. . . . Good heavens! He had not wanted Adele in his house! He had been unable to help himself. He had watched closely, and any one more apparently indifferent to Adele's occasional lapses than Myra he could not imagine.

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He had not credited her with such power of concealment. She had always impressed him as so direct as to be simple.

But there was no doubt now that she was jealous, and jealousy was the very *devil*! It might send her to her father with complaints, and that was a contingency to be avoided, though Milenberg would give her little sympathy; he was too well pleased with things as they were. . . . Adele must go—no easy matter to handle—and it would behoove him to give a little more attention to his wife. Jealous dissatisfaction always inclined a woman's ear to another man, and there was Janniss who was about as completely in love with her as a man could well be. Myra had just shown that she could be "deep"; there might be more between them than he knew.

St. Claire came to a stop before the fire when he reached this point in his meditations, his look grown brilliant and unmoved, his least agreeable expression. . . . The young man needed a hint to keep his distance while Myra was in New York, and he would get it! . . . Nothing he could say to Alyth would have any effect; the man detested him. Still, he was not the kind to dangle after another man's wife.

## CHAPTER XII

MRS. MILENBERG was shocked by the change in her daughter. Myra had not been well when she came to her in New Rome the previous summer, but now she looked something more than simply ill; not so much ill as older, colorless, lifeless. Yet she seemed able to do innumerable things, and when dressed for dinner or the theater, when aroused, she was as beautiful as ever. But animation dropped from her so quickly, like her opera-cloak, a thing put on and taken off.

The week St. Claire had spent with them had been crowded with engagements. St. Claire had long ago discovered that his wife charmed the successful man of affairs. His eastern journey was for the purpose of leading certain men up to Milenberg's manipulation. Several of these men St. Claire had entertained at Woodmansie Place, and there he had observed the impression his wife's beauty had made on them. They were well-scarred financial veterans who felt they had earned the right to dalliance. Myra's combination of warmth and reserve, of cleverness and deference, delighted them. In the luncheons, dinners, and theater-parties St. Claire had arranged for that week Myra had had her place and definite use.

St. Claire was glad she lent herself to his manœuvres without question. For that matter, she had never questioned, and it was only since he had begun to be impressed by her intelligence that he began to wonder if she knew what he and her father were about. In Milenberg's schemes there was always a deal of wire-pulling, and this



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was a particularly intricate combination of manufacturing interests that required accomplished lobbying and a carefully worked-out system of bribery. Milenberg wanted results before the next administration. If she did suspect she appeared quite indifferent, which was surprising in face of the detestation she had once expressed of her father's methods; before their marriage she had been very frank with him concerning Milenberg's record.

And she had never again mentioned Adele. St. Claire had used his utmost skill in engineering his sister-in-law out of his house and into the dull home of her relatives, and, though furious, Adele had been forced to go. She had laid her dismissal at Myra's door, an impression St. Claire fostered; it would not do to have her wild anger directed against himself. If Myra guessed Adele's feelings she showed no sign. She had retained to the end her imperviously polite exterior. St. Claire was discovering that his wife's exterior covered much he had not suspected, and, taking counsel of his caution, he was very attentive to her. He was deeply excited over the financial game he was playing, so a little impetuous devotion was not difficult.

Myra had met his love-making quietly, as inexpressive over it as she was about other things. Her unmoved attitude puzzled St. Claire; his conceit could assign no reason for it, except that she still distrusted him. But, Adele well out of the way, her jealousy would wear off. And he had no fear of Janniss. A skilfully directed thrust had brought the blood to the young man's cheek; he was the sort who would hotly resent being classed as a poacher. On the whole, St. Claire left for Washington well pleased, for the thing he had in hand was going well, and Milenberg was more than satisfied. Myra's moods were of small consequence compared with her father's.

No one but Myra knew what that ten days had meant to her. It left its imprint on her face, arousing Mrs.

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Milenberg's anxiety. This mutual playing of a part, simulating compliance in return for the pretense of love, sickened Myra; allowing herself to be used for the furthering of schemes of which she did not approve was doing violence to her nature, the fundamental requirement of which was honesty. The double strain upon nerves that were already taut had brought Myra's endurance to the breaking-point. When her husband was gone she was too exhausted to stir from the divan in her mother's sitting-room. Lying there, she could look out upon Central Park or down at the ever-changing panorama of the Plaza; she looked, but, it appeared to her mother, without seeing or caring.

As long as her son-in-law was present timidity had kept Mrs. Milenberg from questioning, but now that they were alone she could restrain herself no longer. "You look so badly, Myra—do have a doctor," she begged.

"I am not ill," Myra assured her, patiently. "I am simply tired out, mother dear."

"Is it always like this last week, when you are at home?" Mrs. Milenberg asked, anxiously.

"Very much like it, during the season."

"If I had been with you I should have made you rest. But your father hasn't wanted me to go. And I thought maybe I'd be in the way, too, for I'm not a society woman, and I wouldn't know how to be with your grand friends. So I stayed close by Irma and Ina, like your father wanted me to; but if I had known you were looking and feeling like this I should have come. Your father always said you were doing finely, and such a success. Much men ever notice!" She ended in a helpless indignation that flushed her.

"I am a success, as most people look at things," Myra said, composedly.

"It isn't worth it, wearing yourself out like this."

Myra was silent.

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"I wanted to ask Justin to let you see a doctor," Mrs. Milenberg continued, "but I didn't like to. Let me get one now."

Myra sat up, hoping by that sign of animation to reassure her mother. "I don't need a doctor, mother," she said, more positively. "I have been consulting a doctor at intervals all winter. I am simply nervously depleted; all I need is rest." And in her own mind Myra added, "Happiness."

Mrs. Milenberg persisted. "Have you thought, Myra, that it might be—?"

As always, Myra read her mother's meaning instantly. She flushed crimson. "It is nothing of that kind," she answered, with a touch of sharpness.

"But—I thought you wanted it?" Mrs. Milenberg exclaimed in surprise. "I was hoping it was."

"No," Myra said, bitterly. "Children have no part in the usual scheme of life. It should be mutual love and intention that brings children into the world!" She was vivid for the moment, and trembling.

Her mother was aghast. "Myra! . . . But Justin is devoted to you! I have noticed him this last week. . . . Myra, don't tell me there is trouble between you two!" Mrs. Milenberg had grown quite white.

Myra controlled herself instantly. "Trouble?—*no*, mother dear. Justin and I never quarrel!"

Her mother looked at her doubtfully, still white about the lips. "It was the way you spoke, Myra—that was all. . . . Yes, and the way you have looked sometimes."

"Don't worry, mother," Myra said, gently. "Justin and I have no time for children. I was disappointed at first, but perhaps it is as well so. . . . Have a doctor, dear, if it will relieve your mind. All I ask is to be quietly here with you—for a time. Just a breathing-spell. I shall feel stronger in a day or two." And she



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turned to the pillows with an air of exhaustion she was unable to conceal.

Mrs. Milenberg promptly sent for a physician, who, as Myra had predicted, talked of general debility, prescribed iron and strengthening diet and a trip South if possible, leaving Mrs. Milenberg, at least, much comforted.

"If only I could leave the girls we would go," she said, in mild excitement. "I would like a change myself."

"Poor mother! It must have been pretty deadly for you here this winter." Myra looked at the expensive hotel apartment Milenberg had provided for his wife, with a keen appreciation of the lonely hours her mother had spent in it. Her sisters were at a finishing-school, and only week-end visitors with their mother.

"I have managed," Mrs. Milenberg said, in her patient way. "I was thankful I could be near my girls. . . . And I haven't been altogether without friends. There are a few New Rome people here in New York, and they have been to see me." And Mrs. Milenberg named several, among them Caroline Alyth.

The mention of Alyth's wife interested Myra. "What is Mrs. Alyth like?" she asked.

Mrs. Milenberg hesitated. "I don't know that you would like her, Myra, but I think she is a good woman. She may be a little anxious to get rich, but so many people are like that. I know she has the right idea—that a family must be kept together—that that is a woman's first duty. . . . I am afraid she and her husband don't always get on together."

It was plain to Myra that her mother and Mrs. Alyth had reached a degree of intimacy. Myra sighed inaudibly. A woman's first duty! "And Mr. Alyth, have you seen him?" she asked. There was soothing in simply listening to her mother's voice, a distraction from the thing that Myra was turning over and over in her mind.

Mrs. Milenberg looked a little shamefacedly at her

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daughter. "Yes, he came one afternoon. He took me to the theater, Myra, and in the evening."

"Did he?" Myra was pleased, and not a little amused at her mother's air of embarrassment.

"He came late one afternoon, and after we had talked he asked me, all of a sudden, to have dinner with him; he said we'd have it down-stairs. So we went, and I enjoyed it. Then he said he had tickets for the theater, and would I go? I didn't want to do it—a married man, and taking me out in that way—but he'd surprised me so I didn't have any sensible excuse to give. Well, he just set everything I said aside like that"—Mrs. Milenberg made a little gesture—"and the first thing I knew he had me back up here, and putting my wrap on, and a taxi ordered, and he made me go."

"It was dear of him," Myra said. How well the man understood! That vivid glance of his had seen in a moment the loneliness that sat enthroned amid all that white enamel and mahogany, patiently doing what it considered its duty. "What did you see?" she asked.

"'The Lady from Cape Cod.' It's a pretty play, Myra—all but the dancing. They danced in their bathing-suits, the men and women—'trotted,' Mr. Alyth called it. I didn't like that part of the play. I didn't know which way to look. . . . Mr. Alyth seems to have seen and to know about everything. He is a nice man, though I should hate to cross him or have him make fun of me. He was very nice to me. When he said good-bye he said I might consider that I had been having a jaunt with my son, and if I would permit him he'd come and persuade me to go with him again some time."

"How is Eustace?" Myra asked.

The furrows returned to Mrs. Milenberg's brow. "He is in Chicago, you know. Your father wouldn't give him money to go abroad this winter."

Myra questioned no further. She wondered how much

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her mother knew of Eustace's doings that winter. A supper he had given to some chorus-girls had been commented on in the papers, and had made Milenberg savagely angry. St. Claire had also been disgusted when it had been squibbed in their society sheet. Eustace was going the pace, a little more rapidly each year, headed straight for the breakers. And if her mother knew how things were with her, Myra! . . . She turned restlessly from her thoughts to ask about her sisters.

"Irma is very clever, and growing into a beauty," Mrs. Milenberg said. "She is all ambition, like her father. Ina is not so bright, nor so pretty; she seems to develop so much more slowly than Irma. Your father has planned for them to come out in Chicago next winter, and then come to you. Perhaps he told you? You could do so much for them; there really is very little chance for them to marry as they should in Chicago."

"They are young to marry—younger than I was," Myra said, too gently for disagreement, for her own heartache made her tender with her mother. She looked sadly at Mrs. Milenberg's furrowed brow, while rebellion choked her. Did they expect her to lead her sisters along the path she had traveled, marry them off to position, with her heart telling her at every step that it was not the path to happiness?

By the end of the week Myra was able to be about, the whipping herself up to activity that had become habitual. Her father, who had kept away from New York while St. Claire was there manœuvering in his interests, reappeared, and at his wife's anxious account of Myra's health took his daughter to Tiffany's and insisted upon presenting her with a diamond necklace and a sum of money that he ordered her to spend on "French togery."

"Get some color in your cheeks, and not from the rouge-pot. You're losing your good looks. Good looks



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are always in the market, remember," he warned, "and the best of husbands might be tempted to go a-buying."

Myra knew it was her father's way of showing his affection and his alarmed self-interest. She had filled so perfectly the rôle designed for her. He was immensely proud of her and all her surroundings. What did she mean by flagging? Money bought all things; according to Milenberg's way of thinking it cured practically all ills.

Myra thanked her father, and put the necklace and the money in bank. She already had more jewels than she ever thought of wearing. Her interest in such things was *nil*, for the question Myra was turning over and over in her mind was the ever-portentous one grown more poignant: was the submission to a man whom she neither loved nor respected, the conservation of their home, such as it was, a self-abnegation necessary for the furthering of an ethical principle?

In spite of her efforts to the contrary, they two had come together with divergent conceptions, and had formed one of the myriad nuclei that should contribute to the stable foundations of society. Even if theirs was a home in little more than name, was it not a thing to be retained, conserved, preserved, for the sake of the general welfare? . . . Her mother had faced her problem; many others—Alyth and his wife, dozens whom she had known, had faced their marital problems and had decided against disruption. Was it for the sake of a principle or simply persistence in a time-honored course of action, or for almost purely economic reasons? Did not marriage need the application of a newer morality? Was not mutual love in its completest sense the only justification for marriage, in both its inception and its continuance? . . . Marriage, as St. Claire had entered upon it, impressed her as nothing more nor less than an immorality, an immorality universally practised.

Myra lay wide-eyed in the night, questioning, listening

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to the deadened roar of the city, to which the distant Elevated gave a swell and ebb, a certain rhythmic, surf-like succession. When her mother was busied with her sisters, or with some New Rome friend, Myra went about alone, sitting sometimes in the parks, pondering in a secondary, pitying way the problems of the poor that were engrossing far wiser heads than her own.

Or she strolled Fifth Avenue with a much better understanding of the life crowding its pavements—the endless procession of owned women, the trafficked female, the legally acquired indistinguishable from the illegally annexed, woman's egregious advertisement of man's purchasing power. Men paid and so did women—some as she was paying. Heart-sick and soul-sick to the point of morbidity as Myra was, this endless stream of women parading the basic cause of such marriages as hers, the secret made plain of such a viewpoint as St. Claire's, first fascinated Myra in the explanations it offered, then affected her to nausea. Stupefy her intelligence and accept a lifetime of compliance!

Myra would turn into the shops for relief, not to deaden nostalgia by the purchase of the few yards of drapery that that year's mode decreed should reveal as much as possible of the female form, but for another purpose. She spent much more than the allotted time over the purchase of a Paquin, or a Doucet, or a chiffon trifle subtly designed for allure, that she might talk to the women who waited on her, heads of departments, some of them artists in their way, who commanded large salaries. Myra was fascinated by their viewpoint. They were out shaping life for themselves as completely as circumstances allowed. They had a bitter word occasionally for the restrictions laid on them by tradition.

"There is no provision for us yet," one intelligent woman complained. "The world is arranged for men. Take us as a whole, we business women, we're a lonely lot.

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We're so unsocial to one another. It's only to men we are our social selves. It is the home that has isolated us—we've been in training for it so long. . . . And yet I'd not exchange my freedom for the dependence of that woman out there whose gold bag and her Pomeranian are both provided by some man."

"It must be *sweet* to be mistress of one's bed and board," Myra had replied, wistfully.

For there was a temptation dragging at Myra, a pull that had gained force with the days and nights of pondering—a passionate longing for freedom of choice and action. Why should she return to the huge pretense that was her husband?—to a life that smothered her? If she willed to remain where she was, there was no power that could transport her. . . . A letter to her husband, and the first step would be taken. Right or wrong, she would have chosen her way.

The days passed, bringing the first faint indications of spring, the louder twitter of the sparrows in the Park, the earthy smell that comes with the first sprouting of grass-blades. And with the stirring of spring there had come the stirring within her, the urge to live vividly, fully, and of free will.

And there was little to distract Myra from her thoughts, for with the avoidance of one's own kind, usual to self-absorption, she had made no effort to seek out her friends. If it occurred to her to wonder why neither Janniss nor Alyth came to see her, it was merely a passing thought; her mother's unobtrusive presence was sufficient companionship. They frequently sat the evening through, Mrs. Milenberg in her low chair by the window, and Myra on a cushion at her mother's feet, her head against her mother's knee. Mrs. Milenberg talked a great deal in her monotonous, detailed way, and Myra listened or was far off with her thoughts, conscious only of the loving fingers that smoothed her hair and touched her cheek.



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"Wouldn't you like to go out somewhere, dear?" Mrs. Milenberg would ask, and Myra's answer was always, "It is more restful here." Mrs. Milenberg was content. Widely different though their thoughts, there was the unconscious bond that held them closely; each in her way was suffering.

They were sitting one night, as usual, looking down on the interweaving lights of the Plaza, when St. Claire's telegram was brought to Myra. He would "start for home" in two days; if she left the next day she would arrive shortly before him. It was not a command—it was a thing taken for granted. Myra read, then sat with the telegram held tightly in her hot hand. She looked down and not at her mother. She had come suddenly to the parting of the ways; the two roads lay before her.

"It is not bad word, is it, Myra?" Mrs. Milenberg asked, quickly.

"No—only that Justin is starting—back."

"But you mustn't go, Myra! You're not well enough to go, dear."

Myra answered, with head bent, that her mother might not see her face, "Would you like to keep me always?" The quick beating of her heart made her voice thick. Her prevision saw the grief and fright that would flood her mother's face if she understood aright.

But Mrs. Milenberg was without suspicion. "No, because your place is with your husband; but I want you with me till you are better."

Myra could not go on.

"You must write and tell him, Myra."

"Yes—I shall write," Myra said, in the same husky way.

"I am afraid you are taking cold there on the floor, dear. You're hoarse. Sit on the couch."

"No, no! I don't want to move; I'm not cold!" Myra was feeling with miserable clearness how little of

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a free agent she was; how interdependent are human interests. The words that rose up in her throat would throw her mother into grief, plunge her father into angry disappointment, and strike at her husband's closest interests. And there would be a questioning world to satisfy. Myra felt she would strangle. She caught her mother's hand and held it to her cheek.

"How hot your face is!" her mother said.

"Your hand is lovely and cool, mother." They were silent for the time during which, though cast from one alternative to the other, desire steadily grew in Myra until from sheer necessity it found expression, and in the form often chosen when wishing to soften a blow. "Mother, I have a friend who is in trouble. She has not been married long, but she is very unhappy. Her husband is not unkind to her—I mean in any brutal way—but he is not in any respect the kind of man she thought he was. She never expected the impossible of him, because she knew something of things as they are, but she thought that he had lived, on the whole, uprightly, and always with the longing for the clean, normal thing: for a wife and children and a home, for a helpmate, a comrade. She found out almost at once that he must have cared for many women, that he cared for her only in a physical way, that the money she would bring him was her main attraction, and that what he lives for is *power*. That he is not honest—only a very clever hypocrite. . . . She cannot endure it, mother. She neither respects nor loves him—she *can't*. . . . What is the right thing for her to do? . . . I think she should leave him. Marriage without mutual love is not marriage." Myra's mouth was dry when she finished. How bald it sounded, the confession she had brought out with such pain!

Mrs. Milenberg sat quite still, her hand grown lax against her daughter's cheek. She was not so slow of perception that the real meaning of the thing she had

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just heard could not enter her consciousness. In her steady adherence to what she considered duty Mrs. Milenberg had received more than one blow without outcry, with only the blanched lips and deeply furrowed brow that hung above her daughter now. She had also the shrinking from forcing a confidence that made her always hover about her children, never demanding, only wretchedly distressed. And now, lest she frighten Myra into silence or less transparent deception, she began softly to stroke her cheek again, trying to keep her fingers from trembling. There were things she must say, and for the moment she was dazed.

"Is—your friend's husband unfaithful to her?" she asked.

"Not to her knowledge."

"Would she think it right to leave him, Myra—without that cause?"

"She has asked herself that question many times." And then all unconsciously Myra's voice deepened into pleading. "Mother, she is *wretched*. Yours is the old idea, mother. Hasn't it been proven many times that it is merely the letter of the law? That in marriage there are other sins of omission and commission that are as inexcusable?"

Her mother went on steadily. "When a woman's life is threatened—yes. But it is not like that with—your friend. . . . Did your—friend marry for love of herself, dear, or for love of her husband?" Mrs. Milenberg's somewhat slow brain was striving for clear expression.

"What do you mean, mother?" Myra asked, arrested.

"Did she marry to make herself happy, or was she thinking most about his happiness?"

"Possibly she was thinking—more—of herself—than of him," Myra said, slowly. "I think she was thinking—most—of the home they were going to make—of their



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children—of the life they would have together, how sweet it would be. . . . She told him on their wedding-night that they were 'life-builders.' . . . But he does not think of marriage in that way."

"She had the right idea, Myra. Still, if love's worth anything it's patient. She married for a lifetime. There's many years in which he may grow up to her idea, and she could help him to do it."

"He hasn't it in him," Myra said, huskily. "If he ever had, it has been choked out of him by the way he has lived."

"Is she so wise she can tell all that? Don't she know what her example and patience may do for him? Has she tried setting his welfare first? Has she ever said to herself, 'Would I be making a better man of him by leaving him?'" Mrs. Milenberg's voice deepened. "Life's so terrible long, Myra, and it teaches a lot. . . . With your father, now, and me—it kills me, 'most, to talk of it—but, Myra, if I left him—and you know I've cause—would it make a better man of him? I'm speaking aside from what's my duty to you children—the keeping the property for you by holding the family together. If I left him would I be making any better man of him? I wouldn't. I'm not clever, Myra, but I've thought that out. I thought it out long ago. I've made your father hold to duty so far as you children are concerned. I've made him respect his home. I've made him see the difference between a wife and a free love; that I'm to be counted on; that I'm on the side of law and order; that I stand for what's *right*, and that's not a little thing to have done with a man like your father"—her voice rose a little and shook—"for, Myra, with all his free thinking, and his breaking of the law, and his wanting a younger woman, I've got his *respect*. . . . You ask your father of all the women he's known which he'd call a *good woman*, and he'll tell you, '*your mother*!'" She stopped, quivering and

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breathless, then plunged on. "And, Myra, when it comes time for your father to go, if I'm spared to live on, do you think for one minute it will be that *thing* that holds to him for the sake of his money he'll want beside him? *No. I know it as well as I know I'm living!*" The shapeless, colorless woman was suddenly vivid, passionate, transformed. There were quick running currents of feeling beneath her passionate words, not only the pointing the way to a child over whom she yearned, but the very human urge to assert her self-respect to another woman who, though loving, had doubted.

To Myra it was the revelation of even more. "You must love him!" she said, involuntarily. "There must be a joy in it as well as hurt—that blind, determined love. I haven't it! I haven't it!" The mother's passion had set the daughter aflame; made the blood pound in her ears, and brought the tears to her eyes. Under the stress of feeling she rose to her feet.

Her mother clung to her hand, talking rapidly. "It isn't all love, Myra—it's *duty*. I was brought up on the Scripture, and its commands are enough for me. Take the Bible and read it. It teaches self-sacrifice. The home's *woman's*. It's the thing she's got to think of first, and it's the thing for which she's got to sacrifice herself. For me—I believe there's only one marriage, and that death's the only thing dissolves it. I don't believe there's a half-way. Men, because of their different natures, may go wrong—it's a great pity they do—but women must stand firm. That's my way of believing. I don't want to force it on anybody else. But, Myra, this I know, I've watched and I *know*. If a woman breaks up her home—unless she's got awfully good reason—she's doing wrong. A family must be kept together if it's to be a family at all; and the woman who has no children, she should stand for it for the sake of the woman who has. That's the sacrifice she's got to make."

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Myra stood breathing quickly, the tears scalding-hot on her cheeks. Her mother had swept her for the time being into the emotional, lifted her into the realm of martyrdom—an easy transition. Myra's reason had nothing whatever to do with her tears or the abrupt turn she made.

Her mother came after her and caught her arm. "Myra, where are you going?" she begged. The sudden lift of flame, her brief self-assertion, was dropping from Mrs. Milenberg, leaving her helpless and shaken. It was fright over her child, a fear she had always had of this daughter's going wrong in life, that for a few short moments had transformed Mrs. Milenberg.

"I am going to pack," Myra said. "I am going home." Never, even to her chauffeur, had Myra called the Woodmansie Place house "home."

"Not to leave me to-night, Myra? You are not fit!"

"No; in the morning." She put her hands on her mother's shoulders, looking at her through a mist of tears. She was calmer, more herself. "Forgive me, dear, for the impatient things I have sometimes said. You were making your struggle and I didn't realize it. I can't think it out just now, I can only cry, but I know that we have the same idea, only in a different form. It's the home we love, both of us."

Her mother clung to her. "What do you mean to do, Myra?"

"I mean to try again, mother."



## CHAPTER XIII

NICOLE had brought to Myra the accumulated mail of the last three days, together with St. Claire's telegram telling her at what hour he would arrive that night. Myra had come in on the noon train, and was still in her traveling-gown, with the dust and the weariness of the journey upon her.

She was not thinking actively. Throughout that two days of travel, whenever her thoughts led to self-questioning, she turned from them. She had chosen. She did not want to think. For a year she had thought continuously, and she was tired of it. When her husband came she meant to tell him exactly how it was with her. That the girl he had married was dead, but that she was prepared to do her duty, and as devotedly as was possible to her; that in his ambitions she would assist him in so far as her conscience would permit. Myra meant to make an end of pretense in their relations to each other. If they could evolve something better than the false relations that had existed between them for months, she would be glad. She meant to make it clear that she could not go on with life except on the basis of an honest understanding. So far Myra had considered and decided.

But there was no spring in her step, or light in her eye. The exaltation to which her mother's appeal had raised her was gone, for she lacked her mother's rearing. The thing that had remained with Myra was her mother's arresting question, "Did she marry to make herself happy, or was she thinking most of his happiness?" And her final appeal, "The woman who has no children

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should stand for the home for the sake of the woman who has." . . . Her mother knew life better than she.

When Woodmansie Place loomed before her, Myra had eyed it gravely. When she entered its oppressive elegance not all her will could keep at bay the old feeling of distaste, so she had gone as directly as possible to her study and received Nicole's report there. She still stood while she rapidly ran through her mail, a glance and her waste-paper basket or her correspondence files serving her, until she came to a communication that was carefully hand-printed.

Myra read it; then, grown white to the lips, looked down at the ugly thing that drooped in her lax hold. It stared up at her, its well-printed letters distinct even at that distance:

MRS. JUSTIN ST. CLAIRE,—If you are cognizant of certain facts, my communication is of no value—throw it aside. If, as I think, you are ignorant, you may care to be enlightened.

Fifteen years ago your husband took as his mistress Harriet Swift, a woman who was his secretary, and who for a long time afterward acted in that capacity. She is a clever as well as a beautiful woman, who from the beginning of your husband's connection with her has served him faithfully. She knows more of him and his affairs than any one living. Their daughter, a girl of fourteen, is in a convent in Paris, under the name of Swift. She knows nothing of her real parentage, for Mrs. Swift was not widowed until after her daughter was born.

For years Mrs. Swift has maintained an unassuming but comfortable home at 12 Acton Place, adjoining the Suburban Railway. Mrs. Swift is well regarded in the city. She is highly respected by the many lawyers and judges who know her.

At the time of your marriage Mrs. Swift went to her daughter in Paris. A short time ago she returned to Acton Place. Aside from your husband, George Alyth knows her better, perhaps, than any one else.

From

ONE WHO KNOWS.

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It had come to her mother in much the same way, and her mother had dropped under the blow. Myra received it standing. She kept her feet through the first hot misery over a deceit so deliberately practised. How characteristic of her husband! It had been one long disillusion culminating in this. The wound from which she was suffering had been inflicted long ago, the slow entering of a knife that just now had been too roughly turned in the wound and pressed home. The pain of it sickened her, choked her, set her to groping for a seat.

As she gained the power to think more connectedly, it did not occur to Myra to doubt. This revelation of the man she had married was so in keeping with his nature as she had learned to know it. . . . She had pleaded so earnestly for frankness, a more honest exchange than was usual between men and women, and St. Claire's assurance, intelligible enough to her now, was distinct in her memory. "You can trust yourself to me. I do not mean that I have been faultless, but I have tried to hold very strictly to the standards of my fathers, honorable gentlemen every one of them." He had spoken truth. The dismissal of a woman who for fifteen years had served him would be in accordance also with the standards of his fathers. . . . And her return to service?

Myra sat thinking for hours beside a fire that burned itself to ashes. Late in the afternoon Nicole brought her the cards of callers, and stood arrested. Madame was still dressed as she was when she came from the train; she had not even removed the veil that bound her hat. He knelt hastily to rebuild the fire, his face stamped with the inseeing expression of the model butler. Then, as Myra remained unconscious of his presence, the man stole a second look at her. She was dead white, even her lips colorless. In the framing of black gown and veil she looked ghastly.

"Shall I bring madame her tea?" he asked, properly.



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Myra was liked by her servants; she had always shown them consideration.

She looked at him heavily. "Nicole . . . what time is it?"

"*Quatre heures*, madame."

"Order the car—please—"

"*Oui*, madame. . . . Is it ill news, madame?" he ventured.

"Only what might have been expected." Myra took the letter from the table, and folding it, put it in the bosom of her gown. She rose and motioned the man to help her with her coat.

Myra had a vague impression of the direction she wished to take. It was cityward, and southeast of Woodmansie Place. When she attempted to direct him, the chauffeur looked at her in the same startled way as the butler. Her features were not distinct, because of her veil, but her voice had lost inflection, as if she had grown deaf.

He knew the street. "It's a sort of blind alley which gets it called a Place, I suppose," he explained. "I ran into it once, and had to turn around and come out. Some nice houses there, though."

They came by cross-streets, with the trend always eastward and southward, to the electric railway that is one of the city's big suburban arteries. The commodious house, neat in its coating of white paint, and given character by green shutters, stood on an embankment above the railway. It was well surrounded by trees, the railway side being smothered by shrubs and evergreens that completely hid the side entrance of the house. A well-worn path led up the bank to a small gate.

Myra ordered her chauffeur to stop short of the flight of stone steps that graced the front of the house. The little path that went up the bank from the railway wore the more traveled look. She told him to wait, and climbed the bank to the gate. Here the path took her through

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a tangle of shrubs and evergreens to a side porch. The March day was mild enough to hint of spring—a commingling of wet earth and the pleasant odors of cedar and pine that carried Myra back vividly to the cottage among the pines on the Tennessee mountain where she had begun life with St. Claire.

Myra realized at once who it was who opened the door to her, and from the ripple of expression that crossed the woman's face she knew that she was recognized. It was merely a lift and settling of the woman's broad black brows, but it was sufficient. They looked into each other's eyes during a perceptible pause before Myra asked:

"This is Mrs. Swift?"

"Yes," the woman said, quietly.

"I am Mrs. St. Claire. May I come in?"

The woman's answer was to hold the door wide—a fearless gesture that was in keeping with her entire personality. She was superbly formed, of unusual height for a woman, a splendid head set on generous shoulders. Deep-bosomed and ample, with the waist and hips of a Juno, her black gown, French in every line, draped a wonderful body. And her face was quite as remarkable. Its luminous pallor was given distinction by raven-black hair and brows—broad, level brows above ice-gray eyes. The cheeks were neither rounded nor hollow—a face from which youth had departed, but that was still possessed of a firmness according with the generous mouth and solidly molded chin. In the long look they exchanged each judged of the other.

Myra stepped into a room that reminded her overwhelmingly of St. Claire. It had the same tinting, the same rugs and hangings, as his study in the old St. Claire house. The andirons on the hearth were a companion pair to those in the study. Yet Myra had the curious feeling that she was alien to it all, an interloper amid

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surroundings that had at one time been so intimately hers.

She came to the hearth, and without invitation sat down. Mrs. Swift followed her, bent, and stirred the fire until it burned brightly, then seated herself opposite her visitor. She moved deliberately, her face as expressionless as if carved in wood. "It is chilly," she said.

Myra did not answer her. Her hand had gone to the bosom of her dress, and then she paused, her eyes lowered, considering. Mrs. Swift studied her absorbedly, her delicate contour, the exquisite profile that was saved from expressionless perfection by the intelligent width of brow. With lowered lashes the face was pensive; when lighted by her wide, questioning look, remarkable. Young and slender, everything about this woman suggested delicacy; and yet, despite her extreme paleness and the droop of her deeply curved lips, her face was vital. The waves of her dark hair had a bronze sheen; the chin possessed decision. And her eyes were extraordinary. When Myra looked full at her, Mrs. Swift noticed how widely their pupils were dilated.

"Before I tell you what brought me," Myra said, deliberately, "I want you to know that I do not come with hostile feelings. . . . I simply want to understand—fully. . . . Of course you know that I have been ignorant. If I had known, I should never have married—Mr. St. Claire."

Utterly in earnest though she was, and in the grip of distress, Myra had not lost her grace of expression. The woman was silent—a waiting silence.

Myra drew the letter from her dress and held it out to her. "When I returned from New York I found this. Will you tell me whether or not it is true? . . . *I feel that it is. Am I mistaken?*"

Harriet Swift took it and read it through, then read it a second time, her eyes bent to it so long that Myra knew



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she was thinking, not reading. The only change in her expression was the tinge of color that crept into her cheeks. When she looked up her cold eyes had more warmth.

"Do you know who wrote this?" she asked.

"No."

"You know, of course, that it was not Alyth; this is some woman's work." There was force in her quiet assertion.

"I could not conceive of Mr. Alyth's doing such a thing, though I think he knows. It seems that a man must keep a man's secrets," Myra said, too quietly for bitterness. She remembered well the question she had asked Alyth in New Rome, and his answer. A word, a man's warning to another man, and she would have been saved what she was enduring.

"That is one of the things that must be taken for granted. In a matter like this there are several things that must be taken for granted," the woman returned, coldly.

"The letter tells the truth, then?"

Mrs. Swift studied Myra's wide look. "Are you asking me that, woman to woman, a confidence given by one woman to another, and to be kept as such?" she asked, finally.

"Yes. Mr. St. Claire is the only one to whom I shall mention you or the circumstances. It is a matter that lies between us three. Who else does it concern?" Myra's voice had deepened and grown vibrant.

"It concerns a fourth—my little girl, who is innocent of it all." Mrs. Swift touched the paper that lay on her knee. "If I were brought into court, I would deny this outright. So would Justin. And we would be believed. He would consider that he was guarding a woman's honor, and I have my daughter to shield. I'd stop at nothing where she's concerned. Neither Alyth nor any

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one else can offer *proof*. . . . What I may tell you has nothing to do with what I'll say if I'm forced to it! You understand that, don't you?" For the first time she showed emotion, a passionate intensity that, like her gestures, suddenly burst from her and was instantly controlled. She had shown for a moment all the crude force of the uncultured woman. Her face broadened under passion. She looked the peasant.

"I am not thinking about courts or law," Myra said, in the same deep, vibrant way. "What have they to do with marriage—the real marriage! That is a thing of intention, of oneness in a higher sense. Without it marriage is nothing but a mere legal procedure. I tell you again—what I want is to *understand*."

It had sprung from the depths of her, the conviction bred in her during childhood and girlhood. Her mother's traditional attitude and her emotional appeal had slipped from Myra like a misfit garment. Shock had stripped her creed of all that was nebulous; she held it firmly grasped now.

Mrs. Swift stared a moment. "So you think as I used to! . . . Well, it's true that Justin and I took each other a deal more honestly than he ever took the crazy rich girl he married, or than I took my husband—" She stopped, holding back some further remark, some addition or retraction. She had herself under control again, her grave eyes studying Myra.

"When I thought over that letter, and considered just what must have been the circumstances, I wondered if it wasn't so."

"It was. No matter what has grown out of it, it was." She was moved again by some deep undercurrent of feeling that wiped the coldness from her face. She leaned over, touching Myra in her earnestness. "You have an open mind. . . . Now listen a moment till I tell you how it was with me—a thing or two this letter didn't.

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I was born on a farm near New Rome, one of the Alyth farms. My people were Alsations—peasants from the old country. They worked old Alyth's farm; that is the way I knew George Alyth. You know New Rome—you know that anything possessed of ambition wants to get out of it. You know how the Alsations at New Rome used to work their women; in the harvest field, as hewers of wood and drawers of water. That was what we were. The men held the money, and the women toiled for food and clothes. I've planted acres of corn, and harvested wheat side by side with the men, before I was sixteen. But in the winters I went to school, and that was where the rub came. Most of us are a dumb lot. I wasn't. I wouldn't hew wood and draw water after I got the idea that I could do something better. I made them send me to high school. Then a man came to town who had a business class. I went to that. George Alyth has done me many a kindness—he's white, Alyth is. It was he who heard of a position in a law-office and helped me get the place—Moore and Kilpatrick. Mr. Moore was his uncle, his mother's brother. I was just their stenographer, but I heard law talked there from morning to night. It interested me. I had an aptitude for legal papers; it's a gift some women have, and that kind of woman is invaluable to a lawyer. If I had had a man's chance, and more education, I would have made a good lawyer.

"Well, occasionally some Chicago lawyer or some one from here would have to do with a case in New Rome, and come there. That was the way in which I met my husband—in Moore's office. He was a clever lawyer when he didn't drink. I knew nothing of his habits—I only knew that he was a gentleman, and every bit of me longed for that. I hated the heavy men I had grown up among. He was infatuated with me, and I was proud of the step up he was giving me. We were married



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by the priest in New Rome, for we were both Catholics, and then he brought me here.

"I began life then, and in less than four years' time I drained my cup to the dregs. With my husband it was drink, drink, drink. He had caught at me as the straw that might stop him in his downward course. After the first few months he was never sober. When he married me his practice was going to pieces; in three years' time it was gone and we were in want. Then in a fit of desperation he did a thing that disbarred him. He never rallied from that; that took his last shred of self-respect; he became a perfect sot. . . . I could have shaken him off, I could have divorced him, but my religion forbade that, and in those days I held to my religion. . . . And in spite of what I've done I still hold to it."

She had drawn back, the eagerness gone from her voice and manner. She stroked the smooth satin on her knee, then, drawing it up, laid it in accurate folds, no longer looking at Myra, but at what she was doing. "I don't mean to go out of life without seeing a priest—I couldn't," she said, evenly. "I've gotten all over the feeling that my life was my own to do what I wanted to with it. I've gotten over my kick against marriage. As long as things are as they are, as long as there is no provision for the woman who makes her own marriage, and no provision for her children, as long as men's viewpoint is what it is, she'd better cling to marriage. . . . But I should be granted absolution. There are thousands of worse women than me smiling in their husband's faces and holding their heads high in society. I know a few of them—Justin has had to do with some of them—I know all about it. But I, I took a man—without sanction, I know; but in all the years I have known him I've never looked at another man—not in that way. I tried to be true to my faith. Divorce would have been a worse sin than what I did. I stayed bound to a creature that should have

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been locked up. I supported him, and when his time came I buried him decently and had masses said for his soul. If I hadn't seen him through as I did, perhaps things might have been different. A woman like me—I could have married, and then my little girl would have had a name that belonged to her; it is she I think of oftenest now."

She sighed and stopped smoothing her dress, her cold eyes again on Myra. "You see, I had it hard, and my ideal tempted me. I've noticed with us women, those of us who are not just animals, or merely mercenary, and yet who go contrary to the law that's been laid down for us, it's not nearly so often that we're urged on by passion as that we want to gratify an ideal. We're ready to give ourselves for it; we're different from men in that way. Back on the farm I had my ideal. The broad-faced men, my people, who treated their women like they did their plow-horses, disgusted me. I gave myself up to the first man who impressed me as a gentleman. I wanted nice speech and delicate manners. I got them, but a terrible thing with them that makes a brute of the gentlest-born man.

"It was when we were in actual want that Justin took me into his office. He knew my husband's history—every lawyer in the city did, and they all pitied me. Ask any of the old, well-established lawyers here and see what they will say of me! That letter! They would throw it into their waste-paper baskets! A slander! Believe harm of me? Not they. They know me as a brain, you see, the best assistant a lawyer was ever blessed with. With the average man—if a woman can convince him of her *brain*—she stands stripped of emotion in his estimation. They haven't learned yet to harness the two ideas together. They can't realize that we're a combination of intellect and emotions just as they are. In all these years Justin has not made that discovery.

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He's denser even than most. He only knows in a blind sort of way that I can give him what no other woman can, and it's partly because he's *comfortable* with me—he need never pretend. I'd take my oath that there's never been a man of Justin's type who had not somewhere a woman to whom he is utterly himself, and she is the woman who really holds him. It's *she* should be his wife.

"You see, I knew Justin in early days. I worked for him as I know how to work. I made myself invaluable. In trying to save my husband from ruin I had learned a deal about the law. When he wasn't fit to draw up papers I did it for him. I always coached him before he went into court. I used to go over every case with him. When I learned Justin's business and his methods I was just as much needed. I was his right hand—in many cases his brain. I have a man's head for business, a deal better head than Justin's. It got to be that he rarely made a move without me, for when he did he had reason to regret it. If he'd kept me by him right along it would have been better for him. I am the only creature living who knows all of Justin St. Claire."

The letter had slipped from her knee and lay on the floor between them, and she pointed to it.

"That was what grew out of it all. It wasn't just the ordinary thing. Justin was tied to a witless girl, and I was a woman with a big brain and passions as strong as any man's. And I was bound to a man who had forgotten he had ever shaken hands with a gentleman. I was hungry for his opposite. . . . Oh, I know Justin's faults!" she said, her look kindling as Myra shrank involuntarily. "They have grown on him—they are faults that do grow on a man. Look at the clean boys of twenty who grow into the shaky men of fifty. And a lifetime of keeping things carefully covered eats deep—that's one of the curses that's laid upon a relationship like ours. But



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remember, Justin and I took each other when he was only twenty-six and when he was in trouble because of his first big mistake. Show me the woman who wouldn't have loved Justin back at that time. He hadn't hardened yet and grown so smooth; he wasn't mastered yet by habit." She drew a short breath. "Yes, I know Justin's faults, just as I know that there's something hard in me that has held me to him in spite of it all—perhaps something decent, too. We're complexities, Justin and I, though of different sorts; and yet we are suited to each other. The truth is"—and she squared her shoulders as she delivered her ultimatum—"Justin St. Claire and I are *mates*, and when that's said all's said."

"Yes," Myra said, slowly, "I see." She looked away from her companion, down at the letter on the floor. The confession to which she had listened impressed her as extraordinary in its curious revelation of character. The woman's fearless personality—fearless except when she visioned the priest—dominated the place. Myra sat withdrawn and with eyes lowered. Had their positions been reversed, they would to outward appearance have filled very perfectly the traditional rôles. And in reality Myra did feel that unknowingly she had robbed this woman.

Myra felt that she had listened to the truth. She was endeavoring to grapple with it, to treat it sanely and irrespective of her pride. In spite of her dismissal, and the legal barrier St. Claire had erected between them, this woman claimed him. Myra understood. In a large, vastly possessive way she was fighting for what she considered her due. She was not petty about it. There was a big sincerity about her. She was candid, and at the same time she was loyal to the man she claimed as her mate. She was deeply tender to their unacknowledged child. Myra had come asking for enlightenment, and she clung to her position.

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"Why did Justin marry me?" she asked.

Mrs. Swift had a cool answer to that question, as she had had to others. "He married you as he married his first wife—for 'reasons of state.' What he felt for you was something very different from the big thing there has been between him and me. In the years I have known Justin he has wandered into more than one bypath—only to find them blind alleys. He has always turned about and returned to me. He can't live without me." The assertion was too calm for triumph.

Myra went on steadily. "And, feeling the need, he sent for you."

"Yes." She was not a woman who nodded or helped out her speech with palliative gestures. "Justin's is the monarchical idea. His wife upholds his estate before the world; it's his mistress who rules his heart. . . . When you come right down to it, it's the idea that lurks in the back of most men's brains." She looked down and began smoothing her dress as she had when she spoke of her religion, her voice grown dry. "It took me years to discover that. When he was free to marry me if he would, I began to realize, and when he asked me for his release and married you, I realized fully." She lifted cold eyes to Myra's wide look, her lips tightening on the words, "But by the same token I knew the time would come when he would want me."

"And you met in Washington—before you came here."

The color showed in the woman's cheeks as it had when she read the letter. She did not look away from Myra, though for a moment she paused. Then she said, simply: "For a dozen years Justin has called upon me when he needed me." Her color faded as she continued: "I was in Paris for over a year. As I said, it would have been better for Justin if he had kept me here. I told you he rarely made a move without consulting me. I know

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his business as no one else does. He has already made mistakes; he couldn't go on without me."

She had passed over the thing that lay between them, and Myra let it pass. She rose to go.

"Thank you for what you have told me," she said. "You have given me a great deal to consider."

"Do you mind telling me what you intend to do?" Mrs. Swift asked. "I have been honest with you."

"I don't know—exactly," Myra answered, thoughtfully. "I don't want to do anything that will hurt you or your little girl. . . . Tell me, what is she like—your little girl?"

Myra's voice had dropped into softer cadence. It was a questioning that was hesitant with feeling, a touch of wistfulness. Throughout their long conversation Myra had felt a hurt that she had tried determinedly to hide. Her life lay in pieces about her. She had hoped for so much, given so much, and had received nothing in return. This woman had given also, but she had the supreme possession. During every moment of the time she had sat and listened Myra's thoughts had hovered about this woman's child. She felt a shyness in asking.

Mrs. Swift's face changed subtly—a sagging of the muscles about her mouth that aged her. She looked down at her hands. "She is a little thing; she will never be anything else," she said. "She is lame."

"Ah!" Myra breathed. And after a long pause, "She will have to be taken care of always."

Mrs. Swift's answer was a look. Her eyes had clouded.

"I will never do anything to hurt her," Myra repeated. "You know that."

"I don't believe you would," Mrs. Swift said, a little indistinctly. Then she gathered herself together. "And I haven't meant to hurt you. I haven't hurt you, really. You don't love Justin. A woman like you—you will have your chance. . . . But you will never make Justin see



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things as you see them. If it were not for my little girl, and for Justin's interests—my interests, too, for whatever touches him affects my child and me—I could come out openly. That would help you. But as it is, you and I are in opposite camps. Still, I think we understand each other. I knew as soon as you began to speak that you are one of those to whom it is wisest to tell the truth. Justin would have done better if he had realized that."

"I wish he had," Myra said, her lips beginning to tremble. "He has taken my girlhood from me; no one can ever give me that back."

"You've paid the penalty for living."

"Yes." Myra looked down at the letter on the floor through brimming eyes, and Mrs. Swift studied her gravely, intently. When Myra straightened and turned away without any motion to take it up, the color showed again in the older woman's cheeks, and when at the door Myra offered her hand the flush rose in her eyes as well, robbing them of their chill.

But she said nothing. They shook hands silently.

## CHAPTER XIV

IT was after midnight when St. Claire came into Myra's room. He entered quietly and came up to the hearth where she was kneeling, burning papers. On the table were several packages of letters, and on the floor were piled the books she had taken from the shelves.

St. Claire saw it all at a glance—and what it indicated. "You are up late, Myra," he said, quietly.

Myra started, for, busied as she was, she had not heard him come in. She rose and stood braced against the mantel-shelf, her hands gripping it nervously. She looked hectic; either the heat of the fire or excitement had set vivid spots of color in her cheeks, signs of animation quite out of keeping with her heavy eyes. Dark-circled by fatigue, they appeared immense. She only looked at him; she did not speak.

"Haven't you chosen an uncanny hour for house-cleaning?" St. Claire asked, smoothly.

He did not offer to approach her, he had not even extended his hand, and with a sense of relief Myra realized that he was acquainted with the incidents of the afternoon. His train had been due some three hours earlier, and as Myra hurried about her tasks it had occurred to her that he would go first to Acton Place. That very probably he had named a later train than he intended to take; it would be a procedure natural to him. If he already knew, she was saved much that she had dreaded—the painful repetition of what she had learned, and his almost certain denial. She had shrunk from that useless

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denial as one would from the continued probing of a sensitive nerve. She made clear her intention at once.

"I have been packing," she said.

St. Claire looked about him for a moment in his brilliant, unmoved way. He was pale and his eyes were alight, his usual expression when under mental strain. He had been terribly angry, as angry as he had ever been in his life, and the marks of passion were still on him. Harriet Swift's resolute reiteration that with Myra honesty was the only course, and that she had taken it both for his sake and her own, had driven him to the last degree of exasperation. Even the reassuring fact that his wife had left the anonymous letter behind her had not quieted him. But Mrs. Swift had remained unmoved, either by his anger or his fear.

"She gave me her word, and I trust her," she repeated. "If I had lied to her she would have walked out, and with that letter in her hand. She is no foolish girl; she is a clever woman."

St. Claire's eyes came back to Myra after wandering the room. "Packing—for what?" he asked.

"I am going to leave you, Justin. For months I have wanted to go, and what I learned this afternoon has decided me. . . . I see you know."

"Yes; I know the main facts," St. Claire said. "That you received an anonymous communication and that you went to see Mrs. Swift. I want to explain that I came in on the train with your father, and before starting out here I telephoned to Mrs. Swift about important business papers connected with matters in Washington. She handled my business for so long that I have had to consult with her. She came from Paris for that purpose and no other, and when I have seen her it has been in a business way only. To-night when she told me of the afternoon's occurrences I went out to see her—it was a matter I couldn't discuss over the telephone. I have



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been absolutely faithful to you in these sixteen months of our marriage, Myra. . . . I simply want that fact made plain to you before you explain why you are doing—this.” St. Claire indicated the disorder of the room by a gesture.

“I am not accusing you of unfaithfulness, Justin—at least not as you mean it. . . . You will not understand me, I know, when I say that what decided me was your unfaithfulness to the woman who really belongs to you—to Mrs. Swift.”

As always, her viewpoint surprised St. Claire, but with the rigid self-control possible to him in a crisis he kept himself steady. His brilliant gaze showed no alteration. “I may be obtuse, but I do not understand—in the least.”

“No, and I wonder if you ever will, either you or father or even mother,” Myra said, wearily. “Let us sit down if we must talk. I am so very tired.”

“You look it,” St. Claire said, his voice suddenly at its softest. “I would have done almost anything to have saved you this shock. You feel that I have not been open with you, but you see, dear, I was reared among men who guarded the women they marry from things that hurt—the follies of their youth or a misstep such as mine. You feel that I have not been open before the world—but what man is? . . . In saying that I do not mean to palliate my fault; though what I did is not an unusual thing, and certainly in the eyes of most men—and women—there was much to excuse me. . . . When I married you I did what any gentleman would do—put the whole thing away—severed the relation. Surely you are woman of the world enough to know that that sort of entanglement means very little to a man. The woman to whom he gives his name is the woman he respects and considers. With you it has been more than that. You know I have been wildly in love with you. It made me selfish—I didn’t want even to share you with

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a child. I was wrong in that, of course, and you have never forgiven me. . . . Mrs. Swift shall go back to Paris. Can't you then put the past, my mistakes and our misunderstandings, out of your mind, and let us begin again? Have a child, since it means so much to you. I want you to be happy. . . . This break you are considering—you don't know what it means—"

St. Claire stopped, for even his smooth flow of words was not proof against Myra's uncontrollable shrinking. He had seated himself beside her, both his voice and his touch a caress. He spoke with lips almost against her cheek. Myra put up her hand to shield it. "It is so smothering hot here," she said, thickly. "It makes me—ill."

And she looked as if about to faint. St. Claire rose abruptly, and remained standing, his face hard. He did not offer to open a window; he made no movement of any kind. He simply watched Myra as she wiped the moisture from her brow and lip, involuntary gestures unconsciously repeated.

She gained control of herself gradually. "It is no use—Justin. . . . Sincerity and its opposite cannot walk together. I offered you honesty, and you tendered me pretense in exchange for it. It was that killed my love. . . . The sort of man you have described yourself to be—the gentleman who guards his name at the sacrifice of the woman who has been his mate, who was good enough for his kisses and his service; the man who classes women as sheep or goats, according as the marriage service has or has not been said over them; the man who calls himself a *gentleman*, and his mate of fifteen years an 'entanglement,' and to whom his wife is an object of respect and at the same time a subject for deception—that is the kind of man I told you I could not love. . . . You took my love and my trust and played with it. You have played upon the thing in me that was given me for good

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purpose—that every woman should have if she is a normal woman. The only appeal I ever have had for you is of the senses. For my intellect you have a sort of tolerant contempt. Your father and your grandfather had little use for a woman's brain except as it served to amuse them, and you are much the same. I begged for the man of *to-day*—the man who needs a comrade. You know that was what I asked for, Justin.”

St. Claire was silent.

“I have burned under your misconception of me. You utterly misconceive me if you think that I am half as shocked by your fifteen years with Mrs. Swift as I am by your marriage with me. It is the best thing I know of you, that long companionship that was much more of a marriage in intention and in fulfilment than your connection with me has ever been. She is your wife, not I. For months I haven't felt that I was your wife—not according to my conception. And I believe what Mrs. Swift maintains—that the best there is in you is still attached to her. You sent for her because you needed her as you have always needed her; she has simply come back to her rightful place. I like to think it of you, for it makes you seem more decent!” Myra threw up her hands, an impassioned gesture in one who gesticulated little. “Oh! . . . For *months* I've longed to say some of these things to you, and with teeth set I have tried to pursue my mother's policy!” She sprang up, and going to the window, flung it open to the night-glow of the city. “To be free of it all!” she breathed. “Think of it!”

She leaned far out, and the night noises of the city, that dreamy murmur, the sleep whisperings of the great giant Activity, came softly to her throbbing ears. Every sick nerve in her was leaping. The period of lowered eyes, the gradual assimilation of woman's revolt, the subdued but passionate longing for free action, the thinking silence of months, was suddenly broken, and the words



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had sprung off Myra's facile tongue like drops of cold water flung on red-hot iron. Hot and quivering, she was a passionately embodied "*I need!*"

St. Claire waited in perfect silence for a long time, until Myra finally turned from the window and came to the table on which were her letters. He watched her in his unmoved way. She had taken them up and was absently making a pile of them. She had grown very pale and her hands were shaking.

"I am sorry if I have hurt you, Justin," she said, with the air of withdrawal usual with her. "I know that the round-about and the secretive are natural to you. But I had to speak plainly. I hope I may never have to do it again."

"You have made it clear enough that I have not met your requirements," St. Claire said, icily. "Who is the man who has?"

Myra looked at him, arrested, wide-eyed. "What—do you mean?"

"It is the first question the world asks a woman who throws over her husband without reason."

She flamed scarlet. "You know there is no one! To me the reasons I have given are urgent enough. . . . As for society—let it think what it will."

"Yours is a heroic attitude, Myra, but impractical. Your family will not take your view. . . . However! . . . Would you mind telling me just what it is you are contemplating? You say you are about to leave me?"

Myra drew a long breath, conquering her anger. "I want first to go to mother, for she will be terribly unhappy over what I have done. I don't know whether I can make her understand, but I shall try. Then I want to be by myself. I have not thought farther than that."

"And what of me?" he asked, dryly.

"You will probably live as you did before you met me. Except as I have pushed your social interests you have

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had no real need of me. You have secured father's backing, and that was the important thing." It was said without a trace of sarcasm, as simply stating a fact long known to her.

St. Claire flushed dully under her frankness, the first change in expression he had shown, though in the last few moments Myra had dealt blow after blow upon his Old World armor. To her there appeared to be nothing appalling in the departure from his roof. It was true that she looked very ill, as if nearing a nervous collapse, her cheeks aflame one moment and pale the next. But she was not hysterical. There was a certain intelligent, determined resistance about her that frightened him, even while it aroused his intensest antagonism. In spite of Mrs. Swift's warning that Myra was a woman he would not be able to coerce, he had come braced merely for a dreaded scene with a hysterical woman, from which he would emerge conqueror. But the situation as it had developed was fraught with the gravest danger. He must keep the peace at any cost—keep his wife beneath his roof. If he had not felt certain that Milenberg would second his efforts, St. Claire would have been panic-stricken.

"You say you want to be by yourself. Is it a legal separation you are contemplating?" he inquired.

Myra came around the table to him, as if by coming nearer she might make her plea more impressive. "It is the only sensible and right thing for us, Justin. I know you don't believe in divorce, but just consider! There is no power can ever make you and me one. And I refuse to play the part my mother has played. There is no law can keep me in your house if I will not to stay. . . . But, Justin, I do not want to fight you. I don't want what was in that letter ever to come out. It would hurt her, and it would hurt her daughter still more—the one who is most innocent. No matter how much

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father may question me, I shall not tell him what was in that letter. I don't want to make father her enemy. . . . You know the law, and I don't; but I thought, if I leave you without apparently much reason, and refuse to come back to you, you would have good grounds. . . . I don't need to tell you what I think would be right for you to do if you were free, for that is your affair, but I should be glad if you did it, Justin—indeed I should! There is so much that is fine in Mrs. Swift."

"You take a remarkable view of marriage," St. Claire said, coldly. "The legal contract into which you entered with me appears to mean nothing to you. But it does to me, it means a great deal—the breaking-up of my home, scandal, jeopardizing my business. . . . And I repeat I have given you no *grounds*. I have been faithful to you; you cannot offer a particle of proof to the contrary. I have never been unkind to you, even. I am not a drunkard, or even rough in my language. You haven't a thing to go on except a fault in conduct that was before your time, and even for that you can produce no proof. . . . I have promised you that Mrs. Swift shall go back to Paris. You can put her out of your mind. I have done what is right—I have provided for them. . . . If you will do now what is kind and womanly you will sleep over your decision and change your mind—be a forgiving wife to me."

Myra turned away. The futility of it! And the hurt of it! She had the feeling of one entombed and starving, seeking hurriedly, and with bare hands, to make an opening through a wall of stone. The quiver of her chin, and then the tightening of her lips as she gathered up her letters, expressed her decision.

St. Claire squared his shoulders to it, losing some of his self-control. "I warn you that I shall never give my consent! It's true enough that I can't keep you if you will go, but when a woman takes the position you do, it's



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because there is some other man hovering in the background! You shall not have him legally. I'll fight you through every court in the country first! . . . And if I know anything of your father's mind on such matters, he will stand by me. Who is going to furnish you with an income when you leave me? Not your father! Some other man?" Then taking counsel of his caution, St. Claire caught himself up and spoke more collectedly. "If you don't want me I'll not force myself on you, Myra, but outwardly let us go on as we are. You have made an enviable social position for yourself; go on gracing it. It will be easy enough for us to live separately under the same roof. I'll put no restrictions on you."

Myra had gathered up her letters, and stood clasping them, gazing at her husband with wide eyes and slightly parted lips. When he had concluded she turned without answer to her bedroom door.

St. Claire came after her and faced her. "Myra, will you consent to that?" he asked. "I'll give you every freedom. We need neither of us question the other. You have sense enough to keep clear of scandal."

"No!" Myra said, deep and low. "That is the ugly thing that hides behind marriage."

St. Claire lost all control. "Who is the man?" he demanded, violently. "*Janniss?* . . . If you make a legal quarrel of this I shall name him!"

Myra looked at him steadfastly. Then her eyes dropped to the hand that gripped her wrist, and her chin quivered. "And—you have been—my husband?" she said.

Then with an effort that took force she shook herself free, and, going into her room, shut the door.

## CHAPTER XV

SHIVERING before a blazing fire that with the bright sun of a spring morning made the heat of the room oppressive, Myra looked haggardly at the future.

The night had been a horror. Myra had not slept, a common enough occurrence of late, and not disabling in itself; she had always been able to pull herself together in the morning and go on; but the complete weakness and the agonizing headache that made her helpless was a new thing. It had come on in the second hour after midnight, a knife-thrust passing from her left eye to the back of her head. The base of her brain burned as if seared with hot irons. Her feet were as cold as damp stones, and her back refused to hold her upright. She was blinded, nauseated by pain. Even the touch of clothing against her skin hurt. And with the agony had come a depression so utter that thought was paralyzed.

The morning had brought a slight lessening of pain, and with the first light Myra had wrapped a blanket about her and had crept into her study and to the couch. The bell would have brought her maid to her, and the telephone a physician; but that meant confessing illness, and the blind desire to be gone dominated even such pain as she was enduring. Daylight brought her a little courage; she would have to talk to her father. If only she could get warm, perhaps the pain would pass.

Myra's maid was frightened by her appearance. "I am cold," was all Myra would say. "Bring me some-

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thing hot for my feet and build up the fire." She would not confess that to raise her head from the pillow was torture.

The sun was barely up when her father sent word that he wanted to see her. His brows lifted when he came in. "So you want to go to your mother, do you? You look a fit subject to journey anywhere, I must say!" He squared himself before her, feet planted well apart, hands in his pockets. "What's all this nonsense about separating from him that Justin's been telling me? Have you taken leave of your senses by any chance?"

"As soon as I am able I am going," Myra replied.

"And in the name of all unreason, *why?*" Milenberg demanded. "If ever a girl married well, you have. What more do you want than you have? . . . It's struck me out of a clear sky. I never dreamed that you were anything but satisfied. What's wrong, anyway?"

Before pain had paralyzed her Myra had decided what must be her attitude toward her father. Arguments and pleading were alike useless with him. Some of her silly notions. A little tempest in a teapot. He would make short work of such nonsense. If she did not show him a little of his invincible front she would be thrust aside.

Her answer was curt. "I am not happy with Justin. He offends me. We are not suited to each other, and I detest the way in which we live. . . . I will not go on with it." Myra had set her teeth against pain, and had managed to lift herself up a little.

"Um!" Milenberg said. "Any other woman mixed up in it? Justin's perfectly straight, of course; he's devoted to you; but he's the kind women make fools of themselves over. He said something about an anonymous letter, some blackmailing scheme, of course, based on some connection he had before he knew you. As he explained it to me it was all right enough. You didn't expect to marry a saint, did you?"



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"I have no complaint to make of any woman," Myra returned.

"You haven't?" her father said, with a note of relief that he could not altogether hide.

Milenberg trusted no man, and his son-in-law as little as any. For one thing, he had not liked the look or the air of that black-and-white woman, St. Claire's sister-in-law. He had feared that she might be mixed up in it. St. Claire's explanation had been given with all apparent openness—a discarded mistress who was perfectly satisfied with the provision he had made for her; but Milenberg had always considered Justin St. Claire "smooth"—"smooth" enough to manage his somewhat difficult daughter, he had thought. He had his doubts, which, however, he had no intention of revealing to Myra, so her declaration was a relief. He veered promptly to the conclusion that some of her impractical notions on love and marriage had been offended. He remembered very well that she had very nearly rejected St. Claire because of them. This was probably another bit of nonsense of the same kind that would require effective handling.

At the same time Milenberg was feeling all the impatience and annoyance of the financially absorbed man who is forced to turn his attention to domestic complications. Things were warming up for the next presidential campaign, and with St. Claire's aid he was trying to hustle a bill through the legislature before conditions became inimical. This was no time to have trouble with his son-in-law.

Milenberg was thoroughly irritated, though much too shrewd to show it, for certainly Myra looked wretchedly ill—ghastly. Her trouble was evidently a vital enough matter to her. Women were such fools over their grievances!

"Well, things should be easily enough straightened out

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between you, then, Myra. As I said, Justin is devoted to you, but he's been taken up with business, and you've been doing society pretty hard—mighty successfully, too; I've been proud of you; but a man's apt to be neglectful under such circumstances, and you're not the kind should be neglected. It's simply gotten on your nerves. We'll send you to Hot Springs—or wherever the doctor advises—and when you're fit for it Justin can take you abroad for a holiday and a honeymoon. Believe me, he's ready enough for it. . . . How does that strike you, eh? . . . We'll have the doctor, though, first thing," he added, briskly.

The familiar panacea! A pat on the back! What was the use of talking at a viewpoint such as his? Pain made Myra's answer sharp.

"I'm not a baby, father! . . . Please understand: I do not love Justin, because I do not respect him. I will not live with a man I do not respect. Justin is a monumental pretense, and you know it—you knew it when you married me to him. . . . I am not *considering* leaving Justin; I *have* left him. I shall never come back to him." Myra's gesture was comprehensive. "I am done with all this." With hand pressed to the side of her head, where now there seemed to be an auger boring its way through her brain, Myra sat up and faced her father.

Milenberg knew determination when he saw it. He took his hands from his pockets, letting them hang at his sides, his position when facing a genuine difficulty. His eyes had clouded slightly.

"You can't leave your husband without a sensible reason," he said, roughly. "I won't have it."

"I have given you my reason—a sufficient one for me. I didn't expect you to understand me. . . . I probably could not make a court see my reasons, so I have no intention of trying. If I leave him it will be Justin who will have legal grounds. and I hope he will free himself

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of me. . . . From this time on I want to be mistress of my own bed and board. In spite of my good intentions I have made a mistake, but there is no reason why I must abide by it. To continue as I have been would be an immorality—I have thought so for a long time, and yesterday I realized fully."

Milenberg eyed his daughter. Though he had no patience with her "advanced notions," he had a certain respect for her independence. He had always granted that she had more intelligence than most girls; almost as much as her younger sister Irma, who was more nearly his own counterpart. But Irma took a sensible view of life. She was no revolutionary. She would utilize conditions as they existed, and always to her own advantage. Myra was given to idealistic nonsense, and just now she was certainly headed toward destruction.

Milenberg had no intention of arguing at any length with his daughter; he rarely took the trouble to combat a conviction, for force was so much more effective; but there was a warning he might as well give before he took her in hand.

"Even if you have made a mistake, better abide by it," he said, his voice at its driest. "You don't know what you're facing. To talk about it is one thing; for a woman to walk out into the world alone is another. . . . Better do what the majority of women do whose husbands are distasteful to them, and who have it in them to be straight. Drop the emotional side, get over it, and go on. Look at it this way: there are few women as well housed as you are, and that's the important thing in the long run. The emotional side generally wears off with you women in time—it probably will with you—and then a home and social position and all that goes with it means a lot." Her father's voice had grown so dry it was gritty. "There's one thing you realize, I hope: our family can't survive much scandal. The past is raked up against me still,



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and now I've all I can do keeping Eustace out of the papers. I won't stand for any nonsense on your part, Myra. . . . For the sake of every one—all around—let things, outwardly at least, appear to be just as they have been."

"The part mother has played. . . . No; I decline. . . . You see, father"—and Myra's voice, was as dry as Milenberg's—"I have lived in a family run on that basis."

They were decidedly alike in some ways, father and daughter. Even their features showed likeness at that moment. Antagonism brought out the same capacity to fight to the finish. Myra had a full share of her father's determined individuality, the same urge to self-expression. One was in revolt, and groping for an ideal, and the other in quest of power, rulership over men. They eyed each other steadily, though with Myra it was through eyes that had begun to film.

"And not possessing your mother's good sense, what is it you are proposing to do?" Milenberg inquired, satirically.

"I want a chance to make a different life for myself—one that is suited to me. I want the same chance a man has for free choice and action. . . . Why should a woman be compelled to live half a life simply because she is a woman; because she must be 'well housed'—" She lost her voice, for speech as well as eyesight was failing her.

"And there is no man promising you your 'chance'?" Milenberg asked, in the same tone.

Myra only looked at him. For a moment her eyes had cleared and she saw her father's keen face distinctly.

"Well, I didn't agree with Justin," Milenberg conceded. "You've got plenty of temperament, but you're not the kind to go on the loose. Still, you may as well realize now that that's the first suspicion you'll have to face. There are other difficulties. For instance," and with

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the air of the man who unsheathes the invincible argument, Milenberg pointed to Myra's lace-covered negligée. "That little trifle cost about a hundred dollars," he said, cuttingly. "Who's going to supply you with the like? . . . Not I, I assure you. There'll be not a penny from me, remember."

"Other women work. I can work," Myra said. Her father's erect figure had begun to blur and recede. Like the pain in her head, it was fading into a thing hazily sensed.

Milenberg laughed shortly. "You work! You look like work. You look more like taking to your bed with an illness—and under your husband's roof at that! I've only a last word to say, but you remember it. I won't have any such patience with you as I've had with Eustace. A boy is expected to sow his wild oats, but I've about reached the end of my patience with him! . . . Good *Lord!* What possesses one's children these days, anyway! You all want to go your own ways. The more money a man makes for his children the more trouble they are to him!" He ended in utter exasperation that was not without its note of weakness. Myra's marriage was one of the greatest satisfactions he had ever known. His son had failed him, but she had in some measure satisfied his ambitions. He was bitterly disappointed, and hotly irritated, though he had tried to conceal it.

It was the only time in her life that Myra had heard her father speak in this way, but the grievance of her childhood that had grown up with her was hot in her. Though a fog was wrapping itself about her, pressing her into the pillows, a half-articulate retort was still possible.

"What did you expect of children reared in a family like ours? We had eyes to see, and brains enough to draw conclusions. Eustace drew one set of conclusions, I another. . . . We will go our own ways. . . . You can't stop us. . . . To-morrow—as soon as . . . I am—able . . .

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"I am going—" Myra's voice had trailed into nothing. To keep the encroaching fog from her face she had, with her last effort, turned it to the pillow.

Milenberg thought that she was weeping, and that was the best thing she could do. When a woman broke into weeping peace was in sight. He knew her opinion of him, and it did not anger him overly much. Whose business was it how he made his money, or how he lived? It was certainly not the affair of those whom it kept afloat. Where would any of them be without his money?

"Going nowhere," he said, shortly. "You're ill—nerves gone to pieces. What you want is a doctor and your mother. I'll telegraph her. . . . You let your maid get you to bed, and be mighty glad it's a soft one," he added, more kindly. "It's certainly all you're fit for."

It was his admonition delivered from the door, the last impression on Myra's fading consciousness.



## CHAPTER XVI

**I**T was a very ill child Mrs. Milenberg was trying to nurse back to life.

They had brought Myra to New Rome in the same car that had taken her a bride from her father's house, its elegance serving now as a temporary hospital ruled over by one of the best nerve specialists in the country. He was a small gray man, unalterably Germanic, and testy to the last degree, save to his nerve-sick patients. He had flared at Milenberg when the millionaire declared in his usual curt way that there was no need to move his daughter from Woodmansie Place. St. Claire had little to say to any one. He wore the look of a man stricken by trouble. He left matters to Milenberg.

"Who has charge of this case, then—you or I?" the doctor had demanded of Milenberg, his eyes agleam behind gold spectacles.

"You, of course."

"Your daughter goes, then, where she wishes to go! What is it you know about nerves—you! In nervous prostration the first thing is to soothe—the mind as well as the body; and this big house, your daughter says it sits on her head. Who can become well with a house sitting upon her head? I have here a bad case. I will treat it as I think best!" And he proceeded to relieve himself still further in German.

The doctor's assistant, a tall red-haired nurse with deft fingers and tireless endurance, interpreted his remarks in somewhat more polite English. "Your daughter is

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very ill," she said, with her kindest glance for Mrs. Milenberg's trembling anxiety. "It is a serious collapse due to prolonged strain. Her great desire seems to be to leave this house, perhaps because the care of it has worn on her, and it would be wrong not to humor her. She has asked to go to New Rome; the doctor thinks she should go."

"You think she is seriously ill, then?" Milenberg had asked, somewhat subdued by the nurse's gravity.

"There is nothing more serious than a nervous collapse. Recovery is always a slow matter, even when it's a case of a good constitution. One thing is imperative—relief from friction or anxiety."

So they brought Myra to New Rome, to the room that had been hers as a girl. "Take me anywhere—only away from here," Myra had begged of her mother as she had of the doctor. "Take me to New Rome, mother—that will be the least trouble. Take me away so I can get well . . . this great house is pressing on my head—" And she had wandered off into incoherence, a reiteration of her request, of her determination to leave her husband. Then a noise in the next room had galvanized her. "I won't see Justin!" she cried, wildly. "Mother, don't let him come!"

At Woodmansie Place she had made no progress, and even after the change to New Rome it was two months before she could leave her room. She was so utterly without strength for the first month, too weak and suffering to lift her head. Sleep seemed to have permanently forsaken her; she slept only when drugged.

It was, as the doctor had warned, a slow, tedious recovery, fraught with set-backs. Myra had quieted into what appeared to be indifference after they brought her to New Rome. Even when she could be carried down to an invalid-chair on the terraces she appeared listless because so silent. The only occasion when she showed

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excitement was when her mother timidly told her that St. Claire was in New Rome and wished to see her. Myra refused in a panic-struck way.

"I cannot see him!" she said, flushing and trembling. "If he tries to see me it will make me ill again. I don't want him to write, even—I will not read his letters."

As a result of her mother's well-meant efforts Myra suffered a relapse that was a warning. Thereafter, until she was able to walk, not even her father saw her, and St. Claire's name was never mentioned.

Nevertheless, with the acuteness of the hypersensitive, Myra knew that there was a struggle on between herself and her family. No one, not even her mother, suspected the will Myra was bringing to bear upon her sick nerves; how determinedly she was collecting strength for the contest which she foresaw was inevitable. She learned in time that St. Claire had been in New Rome more than once, so far as the public knew an anxious husband watching over his wife. He had taken every precaution against public suspicion of the break between them. Myra understood and kept to herself her thoughts, her decisions, and her consuming eagerness to be well.

She crept down daily to the arbor on the lower terrace, and with teeth set against almost overpowering weakness she refused assistance in her climb back to the house. Her mother's timid efforts to discuss her difficulties she resolutely avoided, at the same time clinging to her as she always had when in trouble, her heart filled with a passionate appreciation of her mother's blind expending of herself on her children. Myra's throat often ached and her eyes smarted with unshed tears when she looked at her mother's rounded shoulders and anxious face.

But it was useless to discuss a matter upon which agreement was not possible. They both alike loved home and children; in their heart of hearts it was the race need that animated them; it was simply their viewpoint that



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differed. To Myra it seemed a difference that could not be bridged. The leveling effect of greater experience would have made it possible for Myra to talk with her mother, but she was hot with revolt against marriage as she had known it. She was in no mood for calm discussion. How much her father had told her mother Myra did not know, but to rehearse the painful story and reassert her determination was beyond her. Her younger sisters were in Europe for the summer, so she escaped questioning, and New Rome callers were too much overawed by her to venture even formal questions. When they came calling upon her mother Myra sat by, endeavoring to interest herself in their talk, for she was trying desperately hard to put away the painful, to become whole again, normal, and full of clean energy as in her girlhood. Her physical incapacity worried her.

It was one of Mrs. Milenberg's callers who gave Myra her first real interest in those about her. Mr. Baker's death had brought Caroline Alyth to New Rome for the summer. She was adjusting her father's affairs and taking possession of her inheritance, and as she was proud of her acquaintance with Mrs. Milenberg, she called at the villa. When Mrs. Milenberg discovered that Myra took an interest in Mrs. Alyth, she encouraged her visitor to return and bring her children with her. It was true that Myra had little to say during these visits; as an invalid she was excused conversation, but with Dick sharing her chair, and Jack interestedly questioning the value of objects about him, Myra studied Alyth's wife.

What a woman to be bound to for a lifetime! She was one of those who followed ancient precepts upon which she had grafted what was worst in the modern spirit: always nervously anxious, restlessly pushing, narrowly commercial, shrewdly spoken, and self-opinionated. She had impressed herself ineradicably upon her eldest child; though of sturdier mentality, his trend was the same as

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hers. Of Dick she had made a nervous, irascible boy. It was only too apparent that she rubbed his spirit raw, for he was out of the ordinary. He was like his father, Myra thought; he had Alyth's vivid blue eyes softened by dark lashes, a thin, unsmiling child, always busied over something. He also had his father's polite though slightly satirical manner, a cool observation of those about him. He certainly had quick appreciation of the beautiful. He told Myra almost in the words of a grown man that he liked the view from the arbor. He also told her with his father's vivid glance that her hands were "pretty."

On that occasion they were ransacking Myra's work-basket for empty spools, tape, bobbins, a collection of odds and ends for which Dick evidently had a definite use. Then, with the addition of a hair-pin, some scraps of tin, and some sticks, he constructed a device for lifting pebbles from the park. He worked deftly, and with surprising decision. In his absorption he forgot, and brought forth from his pocket a penknife, which was instantly pounced upon by his mother and forcibly taken away from him. He fought frantically for his treasure, pleading that it was a gift from his father, and the scene that followed was not pleasant.

"Father said most boys would cut themselves, but I wouldn't," he contended. "He said I had clever fingers."

"Your father has some strange ideas," Caroline returned, with scorn. "What does he know about your fingers? He's at the other end of the earth most of the time. It's me has to keep them clean, I know." She took him off with the threat that she would never bring him again, that she was ashamed of him.

Mrs. Milenberg had flushed unhappily over the scene. "I am afraid all that noise has hurt you," she said, anxiously, to Myra. "Mrs. Alyth was right, though—his father shouldn't have given that little boy a knife,"

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Myra also was flushed. "His father has discernment enough to recognize that his boy has the fingers of a genius, the thing his mother is too dense to see," she answered, with more of her old animation than she had shown since her illness. "What scope would that woman allow to individuality? None. I am glad I know Mrs. Alyth as well as I do now." Caroline Alyth seen with her children had given Myra a warmly sympathetic understanding of Alyth's revolt, though to the average person he would appear to have as intangible a grievance as her own.

It made her very kindly to Alyth when one evening he appeared at the villa. He had just returned from a two months' stay in South America. Lean, bronzed, and keen-eyed, he lounged in a garden-chair while he told Myra of his South American experiences.

"It is the coming continent," he said. "Its possibilities have not even been touched; its mineral deposits have been no more than scratched as yet. They are still guarded by the gnomes." Then in his faintly satirical way, and yet with a big sympathy for his own kind, he characterized the great mining experts of the world whom he knew. With some of them he had camped. He related their oddities with a humorous thrust at himself as well. "One half of us is pure savage—we love the *feel* of Mother Earth. Last spring in his Fifth Avenue mansion I dined with Harmon, who, like myself, was all white shirt-front and collar. He was testy with his wife over squab-chicken, and champagne that had not been cooled quite to his taste; and not a month later I ran across him in a native camp, contentedly eating toasted ants served him by a brown-limbed native girl. When I first go out in the open, after six months or so in New York, I get down in the sand and roll like a dog for pure joy of it. And in the hills I find a rock and lie cheek to it. I have to rub my nose against nature, dust myself all over, get rid of the first delight,



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before the mentally cultivated half of me resumes sway."

"If women had the same chance to develop all sides, if they trekked into the wilds when the urge is upon them, I wonder what they would grow into?" Myra mused.

"Into an entirely new type that the man of to-day is not capable of understanding. There is no respect in which we are more backward than in our understanding of women. It's man nature to be on the safe side when it comes to his womenkind, because at best he regards her as quite as much a trouble-making quantity as one that affords delight. So the average man adheres closely to the rules laid down in the old, man-written Grammar of Women. We won't even bestir ourselves to get out a new edition on the subject. Woman will have to do that herself. I don't see why she should not write her own grammar, rather than let man write it for her."

"We can't write until we understand ourselves better. We need the all-rounding experience first."

Under cover of the twilight Alyth studied her keenly. What step was she meditating, he wondered? She looked too frail for much trekking into the wilds. Still, though thin and very white, she looked less wretched than she had at Woodmansie Place. With the inside knowledge of events he possessed, Alyth had listened with quick interest to New Rome's comments on Myra's illness, and St. Claire's visits to New Rome. On his way west he had stopped in St. Louis and gone out to Woodmansie Place, to be told there that Myra was ill and at her father's. He had thought of her innumerable times since the afternoon they had spent before her fire. Something his son had said to him about Myra had been in his mind all evening.

"She said it might be a long time, but some day she was going to have a little boy like me," Dick had said. "She hugged me up and told it to me in my ear."

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Alyth began to talk of his boys. "Dick appears to be a good friend of yours," he remarked. "He describes you somewhat romantically as 'The lady on the hill.'"

"Yes," Myra said. "I hope when you come again you will bring him with you."

"I will when I come back from California, if you are here then."

Myra made no answer to his questioning inflection, and he continued:

"I hope Dick will choose a profession that brings him close to nature. The little fellow has the urge to create, and along mechanical-engineering lines. He is an inventive genius. The trait has developed in him rapidly."

"He is unusual," Myra agreed. "I have watched him. When he was here the other day he made this," and Myra took from a niche in the arbor and placed on the arm of Alyth's chair Dick's invention for lifting pebbles.

"A rock-hoister—it's on the same principle! I don't believe the child ever saw one, either." Alyth flushed with pleasure as he bent over it in the half-light. He lifted a vivid glance to Myra. "He is a bit out of the ordinary, isn't he? . . . I confess I've been hopeless about my boys—Caroline seemed to possess them body and soul—but the last year it's grown on me that they won't always be in the infantile stage. It's Dick that has pulled me out of despair. She can't shake the spirit out of him or keep him within the circle of a dollar! . . . But the constant friction and the perpetual rebellion—there seems to be no way I can save him that—poor little chap!" Alyth's face clouded as he turned away from Dick's device.

Myra did not say what she was thinking—that a child never lost the marks of friction and rebellion. She felt that she herself was covered with scars that burned. Instead she led him to talk of other things. They sat in the dimness of the lower terrace, looking down on the

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night-show of the valley until the court-house clock twice chimed the hour. It was not until Mrs. Milenberg, either as a protection from possible chill or as a hint to Alyth to be gone, sent down a shawl to Myra, that he roused. The same spell was on him that had kept him with her until St. Claire had come upon them.

He took the shawl and wrapped it about her carefully. "I am forgetting time," he said. "Is it best for you to sit out like this? Let me take you up now."

Myra did not realize until she stood up how tired she was. In the pleasure of his visit she had forgotten how easily she was exhausted. The journey up the terraces was always a toilsome one, accomplished only after more than one stop, and when she flagged Alyth took her arm. By determined effort she managed to climb half-way up the steps to the first terrace. But there she gave out, and, reaching for the stone balustrade, she clung to it, gasping:

"I—can't go on—just yet—"

Alyth was startled. "I didn't realize that you were so weak! Why did you let me tire you out like this? . . . Here, lean against me."

They stood back to the balustrade, and Alyth put his arm about her, supporting her. When the light at the top of the steps showed him her face Alyth realized that she was completely exhausted.

"Put your head back on my shoulder. Trying to hold one's head up takes effort."

Myra did as she was bidden, for the world was going black. Alyth's "You are not going to faint? Don't try to hold yourself up. Relax," though spoken close to her ear, came to her from a long way off.

Alyth held her up, then he drew her close. Her head hung back a little, her face upturned, and he looked down on the carven contrast of dark brows so marked against the white skin that their arch appeared penciled, the



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lashes a black line above sunken cheeks. The shawl had loosened, showing her throat. But for her slightly parted lips, quivering with short-drawn breaths, and the soft, live curves of chin and throat, the face had the remoteness and austerity of the dead.

But her throat with its suggestion of pulsing life, and the heart-beat under his hand, the slim, firm-bosomed body that with a motion he could have turned and held against his breast, were alive, compelling enough. Alyth's dark face darkened still more, almost to purple, as he looked down at her and watched strength slowly revive. This intimate clasp, and her complete dependence, touched off the thing that had been lightly slumbering within him for many days, a restless, hovering interest to which he had given no name, because it had till now scarcely lifted out of his subconsciousness. But this was a pulsing enough realization.

He had no answer for her when she unclosed her eyes, and said, more clearly, "Things went out for a moment." A moment that for him had been a swaying on a hot sea.

He released her, helping her silently as she went slowly on. On the upper terrace she stopped again.

"I am so *good for nothing!*" she said, with a gasping exasperation that was half a sob. "What am I to do if I stay like this!"

Alyth had found his voice now. "You will be better; it is simply exhaustion. . . . Let us sit down for a few minutes."

There were benches on the upper terrace set so as to face the view, and Myra willingly took the first one they reached. It was some time before her breath came regularly, a space during which Alyth said nothing, but twice his hands touched her, drawing the shawl more closely about her. It was not until Myra said, in her usual voice, "I can go on now," that he asked, abruptly:

"What do you mean to do—go back to him?"

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It was his voice more than the abrupt question that arrested Myra, the hotly irritated note. The question sounded to her like an accusation, and her answer came a little hotly:

"Did you think I would do that?" She had stiffened and turned so that she faced him.

He hesitated. "I was not certain—"

"You know I wouldn't! I *couldn't*. . . . I am done with marriage—as I have known it."

"You have a fight before you, then." His tone was quieter, kinder.

"I know it; that is why I want my strength. . . . You know what caused the final rupture? . . . She has told you, of course. I know you are friends."

"Yes, she told me. . . . I've always been her friend. It's been a sort of lifetime friendship. I suppose we have remained friends because she's more nearly like a man in some of her characteristics than any woman I have ever known, and that eliminated the sex complication. In a way it's been an analyst's interest I've taken in her. She is a curious combination, or rather a whole set of curious combinations; she is both primitive and subtle, wise and ignorant; she has the Catholic peasant's awe of the priest, and a twentieth-century lawyer's brain and methods. I have an honest admiration for Harriet Swift, and in spite of the fact that I utterly disapprove of her relations with St. Claire. She has stood by him through everything—she will always stand by him, unless it should come to a choice between him and her child. Then she would not hesitate a moment, for she loves that lame girl of hers beyond any one or anything. How much of her loyalty to St. Claire is based on her determination to work out a future for her child I don't know. With her the end sanctifies the means; that has been her rearing."

"And the little girl—have you seen her?" Myra's voice was low.

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"Yes. She has a beautiful face. She is unmistakably a St. Claire. But she has a poor little frail body. A sweet-natured child she seemed to me when I met her in Paris last year, with the air of melancholy, or rather of pathos, about her that is usual with the deformed. She makes a double appeal to that big, Junoesque woman. She broods over her with some of the ferocity of a she-tiger."

Myra drew a short breath. "You know, of course, that I married in ignorance of it all?"

"I was not certain of it in the beginning; it didn't seem possible he would run such a risk. I decided it was so later on."

"And if you had chosen you could have saved me—how much it remains to be seen. . . . I have often thought, in these months when I have been able to do nothing but think: suppose I had been a clean, honest boy of twenty, and Justin the woman in question? You would not have hesitated long. You would have saved the boy." Myra had felt the hurt of it and could not restrain the reproach.

Alyth winced. "It is not easy to go back of one's rearing. . . . In a way I have reproached myself. Yet if the same combination of circumstances arose again I doubt if I should act differently. If I did it would be doing violence to something in me. I went far when I dragged out my private affairs and aired them; but I felt driven to do something. I didn't realize then—I know now that I didn't want him to have you—" He stopped abruptly.

But Myra was following her thoughts, not his apology. "A man is always a man's friend. . . . I wonder if he ever is really a woman's friend?" She sighed, then rose a little abruptly. "Yes, one's rearing is responsible for a deal. . . . Let us go up now."

Alyth said nothing, though he kept at her side. After an appreciable pause he answered, quietly. "Occasion-



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ally a man is really a friend, even to the woman who strongly attracts him, though I fancy he has to fight through a good deal to reach it. . . . I am your friend, Myra St. Claire—I always have been, in spite of my shortcomings. You know that, don't you?"

"I hope you are," Myra said, with a touch of feeling. "I like to think you are."

They had come to the house, and at the entrance Alyth stopped. "I must go now," he said. He lifted one of her hands and laid it on his broader palm, looking at it. "You know, I have always liked your hands. I have a tremendous faith in them. They are the hands of an accomplisher, and at the same time they are beautiful—the most beautiful thing about you. . . . If ever there is anything I can do for you—as man for man—you'll let me know?"

"Thank you," Myra returned, as gravely. "I shall need friends."

## CHAPTER XVII

IT was not until October that the little gray doctor nodded his approval of Myra. "*Sehr gut!*" he said, lifting his head from her chest. I was afraid at first of that important little organ. I do not like to see lips so blue as yours sometimes became, but I will confide to you now that had I a heart half so strong as yours I should expect to live till ninety." He eyed Myra keenly. "There is no more a hot box at the base of your brain?"

Myra smiled at him.

"And the houses no longer sit on your head—*nein?* . . . Hereafter, then, let them sit upon their proper foundation—the earth. *Ende gut, alles gut.*"

But Myra knew that it was only the beginning with her. She knew perfectly what her father's squared shoulders meant when a few days later he came briskly down the terraces to her, just as she had known all day what her mother's anxious look portended. Milenberg was snatching time from business to settle his family for the winter. In a few days the younger girls would return from Europe; he had their winter campaign to plan. Eustace, after a summer spent in Chicago on short rations, had been compelled into one of Milenberg's many offices under promise to learn something of business. And now there was Myra's affair to settle.

He began without preamble: "Well, you're looking fit again. You know your husband and your home are waiting for you. Isn't it about time you went back to them? . . . I don't begrudge you a home, but a little longer

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and the cat will be out of the bag—it will get about that there is trouble between you and your husband, and that's the thing we don't any of us want. Be sensible and go back to him. I don't think he needed it—I think he's been ill-treated myself—but if by any chance he did need a salutary lesson, you have given it to him. Forget the upheaval, and go back to your duty, Myra. Justin will receive you with open arms."

"So he has written me," Myra answered, composedly.

Milenberg did not like her manner. "In a month the family's got to be in Chicago, and then your mother's hands will be full with the girls," he urged. "I'm taking her up with me to the city this afternoon to look the house over and arrange for some renovating. You know I want the girls to come out there and then visit you at Woodmansie Place. It's going to be bad business for them if it's known you've left your husband. Justin has an established reputation; our family hasn't; the blame would be laid at your door. I want your sisters to marry as soon as possible, and men are apt to shy at girls who make a mess of things, as you've tried to do. One sister is judged by another."

"Yes," Myra said, steadily, "I have thought of the girls."

She and her father were seated in the arbor where two months before she had sat with Alyth; where two years before they had all gathered after dinner. Myra remembered the hot, quick beating of her heart when St. Claire had led her off to see the garden. The arbor had escaped Milenberg's innovations, possibly because Jan-niss had urged that it be retained. The bed of love-in-a-mist still flourished, sprayed occasionally from the brimming gourds held by the water-nymphs at the fountain edge.

Myra remembered it all with the dull ache that had become habitual when thinking of the past. She lifted



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her eyes, only to see her mother standing aimlessly on the upper terrace. Mrs. Milenberg had hurried away when she saw her husband coming. She knew his errand, and was waiting to hear the result. Myra could not take her eyes from her mother's shapeless figure; she was pathetic in the midst of all that unsatisfying grandeur. She was thinking of her children, of course. Were they ever out of her thoughts for a moment?

Something in Myra's expression touched off the shrewdness that was Milenberg's gift. "If you did such a fool thing as to get into a legal tangle with St. Claire I believe it would kill your mother," he said, tersely. "She loves you full as well as she does Eustace. You'd be hitting your sisters a blow, too."

A spasm crossed Myra's face. She looked down at her clasped hands. "How is Eustace doing now?" she asked, a little huskily.

Under his cool exterior Milenberg felt the elation that was his whenever he discovered a loose plate in the armor of a financial adversary. Myra's reserve had begun to worry him. She had a determined will; she had certainly succeeded in leaving her husband's house. It would be awkward if she should announce that she meant to stay where she was.

"Eustace? . . . Oh, he's sitting around my office, a nuisance to everybody. He's quiescent at present; no money to raise hell with." Then, with the cool persistence that had gained him every victory he had ever won, he pressed his advantage. "Your mother's not strong; she'd break if one of you children got into trouble."

Myra did not lift her eyes, for fear her father would see the fire in them. If she looked into his face she would speak her mind, and what she wanted was peace. She could not endure a repetition of the scenes at Woodmansie Place. But feeling ran hot in her. Who was it had carved the lines in her mother's face? Her father had gone a

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step too far in urgency, a rare thing with him in business, but in this case he was dealing with a woman, and she his daughter, so he had not been so careful as usual. Of what use to yield to so omnivorous a will as his? What had her mother gained by it? What would her sisters gain by it?

"It is a pity about Eustace," she said in an expressionless way.

"Well, let's drop Eustace. . . . When are you going back to your husband?" Milenberg asked, brusquely. "I don't mind telling you that I've talked the matter over with Justin, and if you insist he'll agree to your living separate from him, but he feels as I do, that you owe it to us all to go back to his house and outwardly, at least, let things be as they have been."

"He has said the same to me—and more. I don't want to talk about it; I shall write to him." She rose, determined to escape further talk. "I am going up to mother. I want time to think."

"All right, think it over. I don't want to hurry you, but in a couple of days I'll bring your mother back with me from Chicago, and then I want an answer. You can't stay on here indefinitely; the thing must be settled. I want you back at Woodmansie Place before I go to San Francisco. It's important business. I'll be kept there a while, and I don't mean to be bothered when I'm there by family affairs. . . . If I didn't know it was for your own good, I wouldn't urge it, but it is—for yours and everybody's."

"Very well," Myra said, turning away.

Her father watched her go, with mingled annoyance and satisfaction. Since this trouble of Myra's had come up he had congratulated himself innumerable times on the astuteness that had denied her request for some settled sum that she could call her own. The appeal to her affections he judged would be effective, but most

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questions came down to a matter of dollars and cents, and Myra's affair was no different from any other business proposition.

Myra came up the terrace to meet her mother's anxious question, "You and your father haven't quarreled, have you, dear?"

"No," Myra said, gently, "we have not quarreled, mother dear. He wants me to go back to Woodmansie Place at once, and I have said I would give him an answer when you come back from Chicago. . . . I don't want to talk about it, mother; the whole thing makes me feel ill. That is why I have not talked with you about it all these months, and I want to thank you for not forcing it on me. Let us not discuss it now. I shall try to do what is right."

"It is best to be forgiving, dear."

"So we have always been told. . . . Father says you are going this afternoon. Let me help you get ready."

Myra sent away the maid and herself packed her mother's bag. Luncheon over, she helped her to dress, listening meantime to anxious instructions about the household. Now that Myra was well, they had gone back to their old relations, Myra caring for her mother; only to-day she was doubly tender. She was childishly eager for the touch of her mother's hand. She put her cheek to it, caressed it. In spite of Mrs. Milenberg's protest she knelt and put on her shoes. Myra clung so to her in parting that Mrs. Milenberg laughed affectionately at her.

"You behave as you used when you were four years old," she said. "Whenever your father took me off anywheres you used to hold to my skirts till the last minute."

"You know I love you, mother? . . . I love you better than any one living. You know that?"

"I believe you do," Mrs. Milenberg said, the tears



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gathering in her eyes. "It would be everything to me to see you happy again, Myra."

"Perhaps I shall be. I mean to knock again on the door of happiness—" If her father had not called impatiently that they would be late, Myra might have spoken from a heart too full for concealment.

But Mrs. Milenberg, obedient as always, had hurried off, and Myra watched from the window as long as the automobile was visible, the tears brimming in her eyes when it slipped out of sight. Myra rarely wept, but the tears rolled down her cheeks while she wrote, speaking to her mother on paper:

MOTHER DEAR,—I am going in the morning to New York, and shall leave this to be given you on your return. I want you to have it while father is with you, for I don't want you to be frightened, as you would be if you were alone. Father will tell you that I am in no danger. I have not gone off with any thought of hiding myself, or of doing anything wrong or secret. I have simply left father's house as I left Justin's, because I want to make a home of my own—not one furnished me—but a place paid for with my own efforts. I want to be free, economically and in spirit, just as a man is. I have enough to keep me for a time, until I find something to do by which I can earn my own bread.

This is not a sudden idea of mine. I longed for it when I was in New York with you last spring. Even before that I often thought of it—it has been in my mind ever since I knew that Justin and I were in no sense one, that we never could be one. In your first panic it may occur to you that I have gone because of some man. Father and Justin may think the same thing, though from what I have said to them they should know better. You, even more than they, consider that a woman lives only in and through and by reason of some man. You have guided your whole life by that principle, so some such fear *may* trouble you. Don't let it. I am in love with no one, mother dear, unless it is you. I love you dearly. From a little baby I have loved you. It has been watching you, understanding your

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troubles, that has given me many of what you call "my advanced ideas." If I thought that in the end I should be doing you harm by following my convictions, I doubt if I could go on. What I am doing can't really hurt you unless you allow yourself to take a wrong view of it.

So I say again I am not being led away by a man, or following a man, or any of the things you may think. No man has entered into my calculations. There is no one whom I love or want. I think I am simply very much in love with life, and that I want to live it in the future not as you have lived it, and not as Justin and father would have me live it, but in accordance with my own conception.

There is one thing I want very much—I want Justin to free me legally. I want it for all our sakes—because it is the sensible thing. Knowing what I do of Justin, that for years there has been another woman who has meant much more to him than I ever have; knowing what I do of myself, of my wish for love, and a home in which I can be copartner with my husband, and not the makeshift thing I have been and always would be to Justin—a cross between an odalisque and a chatelaine; knowing how much I want a child, the thing he does not want—I feel we should be parted. What I beg of father is that he will do what he can to make it possible.

Then about the girls. Father wants me to help marry them off this winter. Feeling as I do, I cannot do it. They are only eighteen. What do they know of the big thing you and father want to hurry upon them? Just nothing at all. Possibly they have the same conglomeration of ideas I had, that I still have—with the exception of the one idea that my unhappiness has fixed in my mind, that in marriage mutual love in its highest sense is the only law, that without it marriage is merely a cover for unbeautiful motives. In my case, as viewed by father and Justin, it was an arrangement for social and financial benefits into which I was led blindfold. Justin had no *real* love for me. There was not a particle of *love* in his feeling for me. Mother, he has hurt what is *nice* in me—he has made me ashamed. I cannot endure him. There is no one else to whom I could tell this but you.

So *don't* hurry the girls. Give them time. Give them a

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chance to know. And don't think I am blaming you for my unhappiness. You were trained not to understand the realities, so you are not to blame. You advised me as well as you could. You have been sweet and loving and self-sacrificing always. You have always been dear to me, and I have never wanted you more than I do now as I sit writing to you. I shall always want you. I feel that sometimes we will be much closer and more understanding of each other than we have ever been—perhaps when life has taught me more, and you have opened your mind to some of the things that have crowded into mine. I could not shut them out, because I was born a generation later than you and was not so carefully trained to resist them. And I have had an experience that has made me think—possibly wrongly sometimes—but from the beginning I have been *absolutely sincere*.

And now, mother, *you must not worry over me*. In spite of my mistaken marriage—a mistake I think most girls would have made—I am a fairly sensible and capable woman. As long as I *think rightly* I will come to no harm. I want to be so busy that I shall forget the ugly things. Please help me by not agonizing over me. Try to take my view—that the world is full of work that a woman can do, and not necessarily within her home, though that is the work I love best, just as you do. You once said to me that you thought there was no “half-way.” That there was only one marriage, and that death alone dissolved it. That the joy of self-sacrifice was the highest happiness. Try to think with me that there is waiting for me in the future another chance of happiness—a more rational idea than the martyr conception of the Middle Ages. Try to conceive of a future in which men and women are more nearly equal in opportunity and in the judgments meted out to them.

Not a word I have written has been written unlovingly, but with all my love—every bit of it.

Your devoted daughter,

MYRA.

Don't try to follow me and dissuade me. Father may want you to do it. Don't do it; it would be useless. I shall write to you often, and if ever I am ill I promise to send for you. As



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soon as I find a place to live I will send you my address. I have kissed you good-by—for a little time.

MYRA.

Myra's note to St. Claire was brief:

DEAR JUSTIN,—I have several letters for which to thank you. If I had had anything more to say than I said to you at Woodmansk Place, I would have answered before. I cannot come back to you, Justin. We are without love for each other. I cannot be as I was to you, and I will not accept the alternatives you have suggested.

Father will tell you that I have gone to New York. I am starting out anew in life with the earnest wish to make good, and I beg you to help me by setting me legally free. It is the only solution for us. Your child should be your heir, and your friend of fifteen years should be your wife—she is your wife now, really. I am only twenty-three. I have most of life before me. Won't you give me the chance to make the best of it? For once be open and fair with me, so I can call you my friend?

With my best wishes,

MYRA.

Her letter to her father was written later, while she was waiting for daylight.

DEAR FATHER,—Forgive me for what may appear a deceit. I did not tell you my intentions this afternoon, because I was afraid of such another scene as at Woodmansk Place, and I need all my strength.

You will see my letter to mother, so I need not repeat. *I will never return to Justin.* Any plan you may have that includes that possibility is useless. I mean to find work of some sort that will not bring me before the public. For all our sakes I want to avoid newspaper notoriety. I know that to find something to do will not be easy, for I am trained to nothing. My earning capacity is on a par with that of any fairly intelligent housekeeper. I have an aptitude for drawing, and that is my only asset.

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I know it's useless just now to make a request. Your plan will be to starve me out, and, if that does not succeed, to tire me out. Nevertheless, I am going to make a request: please do not try to coerce me. I am your daughter, and frequently I recognize in myself some of your own persistency and cool resourcefulness. Help me, instead. I have a little of your capability. I have it in me to succeed in an undertaking, and I am not a bit afraid of work. But I have no training. If you will give me enough for a course at some good polytechnic, I will make good. A little of your loose change would do it, and it is the only legacy I should ever ask of you.

But whether you help me or not, I mean in the end to become a self-supporting woman. Some time in the long future I hope to have a real home, a husband who will be my friend as well, and children. I look forward to it as mother does to heaven—a thing that is a long way off and very beautiful.

Only one thing more. I know your methods so well. You will have me shadowed in New York. While you are in California you will know exactly what I am doing. I am quite indifferent—I shall do nothing of which I am ashamed. *But I warn you*, if the person in your employ tries to interfere with me *in the least particular*, if through you I lose the opportunity to work, *I shall send an intimation to George Hampton Merwin that will bring him from Washington by the first train.* Did you suppose I was a wooden doll at Woodmansie Place when you and Justin and the group used to meet? Did Justin think I was bereft of my senses when he used me to smile on the men you wanted to influence? I could interest Merwin. I haven't much money, and it would take just some such underhand trick as driving me out of work to make me desperate. I'm willing to let things take their natural course, but coerced I will not be. Live and let live, father!

You may not believe me when I sign myself "Your loving daughter"; nevertheless I am. There is so much in you that I admire, and you are my father—there is nothing can change that.

Your loving daughter,

MYRA.

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Before the sun rose over the hills Myra went down the road circling the terraces. She had watched through most of the night, sitting at her window. She was leaving her father's house, and not, as before, with the sanction of all the conventions. . . . She saw the flaring furnace fires of Mill City yield to daylight. When the train drew out of the valley the river and the lowlands were streaked with mist.

As to so many of the children of the Middle West, to Myra the call was eastward, a craving to reach the hub of the great wheel that had in the past by its momentum flung human energy westward. She was young, and with the urge to live beating in her veins, warming her through and through; it was a tremendous thing to be beginning life anew and in the greatest center of energy in the Western Hemisphere.

Myra looked with parted lips and vague eyes at the black soil that had nourished her. As she passed the furnaces a downward sweep of soft-coal smoke belched from a smoke-stack eddied through the car, a reminder of her eager childhood and groping girlhood. Her heart cried within her for another chance.



## CHAPTER XVIII

MYRA raised the window-shade, then piling the cushions behind her and drawing a coverlid over her feet, she watched the electric display of Broadway. She sat very still and with a look too immobile for interest.

Myra had been less than a month in New York. It had taken her more than a week to find this room she called home—an odd, triangular space tucked into an angle formed by the two hotel wings, and the little bath-room adjoining in which over an alcohol-stove she could cook her breakfasts. The hotel was on the fringe of the theater district, a few doors west of Sixth Avenue, second class, therefore moderate in charge, and in the main respectable. It housed a conglomeration, theater people, many of them; a number of working-women, heads of departments in Fifth Avenue shops; newspaper men and women; a few teachers for whom the stir of the theater district had attraction, an antidote, possibly, to too much pedagogy—busy people, nearly all, with little time or curiosity to expend upon their neighbors. Myra's room was on the tenth floor and looked southwestward, in the afternoon catching the sun, and at night glimpsing the electric debauch of Broadway, its flashings and darkenings, its comings and goings, the winking eye, the galloping chariot, the writhing, twirling serpents, the solemn owl, the crouching lion, the electric delirium tremens of the Great White Way.

In New Rome Myra had evolved her plan. It had been clear enough to her discernment that she was fitted to do

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very few things; that so far as trained earning capacity was concerned she was, as she had told her father, on a par with the average intelligent housekeeper. She had executive ability, she had that asset, and also she could draw well. Her color sense was good; she had a natural aptitude for the decorative. But in "hustling for a job" she knew that they would be of little assistance to her. What she needed was training, experience, and without her father's help they would be almost impossible to come at.

Myra had enough money to house and feed her until spring, and the sale of her jewels—if she was brought to that necessity—would certainly pay her expenses for another year. But they allowed nothing for instruction in some specialty—a thing she *must* have if she was going to make an adequate living for herself, and to be self-supporting was her unalterable determination. If only she had been taught some trade!

Myra had never counted upon her father's fortune. He was absolute lord of his possessions. And he was one of those who would not hesitate to cut a child off without a penny if he were so minded. His interest was in another than the mother of his children. Myra had always felt that at some time James Milenberg might set aside his family. But he owed his children something, and Myra meant that, if possible, his debt to her should be paid in practical coin.

She had formulated her plan. The first thing was to prove to her father that she was in deadly earnest, and the only way in which she could do that was to carry out her threat—work. A position of some sort she must find, and when found she must make good. Like every man who has fought his own way, her father respected will-power and determination. And he had a tremendous admiration for success. He would not want her to work; it would offend the pride that was no small part of his

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composition. He would endeavor to drive her from it, but if she could cope with him she hoped to get enough from him to fit herself for self-support.

She knew he would not follow her to New York. It would be giving her defiance of him too much importance. He would allow her time in which to become discouraged. He would go to California in all apparent indifference.

Myra had puzzled endlessly over her possibilities, until a remark Karl Janniss had once made occurred to her. Once, when looking at her drawings, she had asked him what he thought of her capability. Janniss had shrugged. "You will never make an artist; you haven't the—*feeling*."

"I have never thought of that for a moment," Myra had returned. "I have wondered, if I chose, whether I could use my drawing in a commercial way—designing, possibly; or interior decoration?"

"You might," Janniss said, considering. "Architectural drawing, for instance, you would do well. . . . You would make a good draftsman; but one rarely sees a woman in an architect's office."

The suggestion had clung. That was one of the reasons she had tried to find a stopping-place within walking distance of the up-town architects' offices. That was work she thought she would enjoy and that would not bring her into public notice. She could not serve in a shop; there were too many people in New York who knew her. For an office position she was not trained. After being shocked by the high prices and long leases demanded for apartments everywhere, Myra had seized joyfully upon the little triangular room which she was permitted to rent by the month. No questions had been asked her, her appearance and the fact that she paid willingly having been sufficient.

Then, with the telephone-book to guide her, Myra had made a list of the architects' offices. It was a long



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list—long enough, she thought, to afford one vacancy. She had a collection of her drawings, her sole proof of capability, and, armed with them and wrapped in an almost total ignorance of a draftsman's duties, Myra had bombarded New York. She started on her quest on the 13th of November, a frosty day that made furs acceptable.

Myra did not bear the usual marks of the unemployed. It was true that her gown and hat of warm brown were of the last season, but they had both been French models, unusual in cut and shape, and of exquisite material, by no means out of date except to the *blasé* investor in imported apparel. Her furs, a modish muff and stole, were Russian sable. With the color of courage deep in her cheeks she was as arresting a vision as any that walked Fifth Avenue.

Myra lived through a week punctuated by rebuffs. It was useless to rage inwardly against the barriers every employer had erected about himself. In no office did she get further than the table of the head draftsman. As a general thing the office-boy, after a stare of wonder, disposed of her. She was assured innumerable times, and often with scant courtesy, that the office was supplied or that that particular office never employed women in that capacity, that very few architects' offices did, and frequently with the addition that she had chosen the deadest season of the year for her quest. The looks of curiosity and amusement cast upon her by draftsmen, and the chill appraising glances of the stenographers, were not easy to bear—no easier to bear than the glances of masculine interest and feminine appraisal that she had met with on all sides.

That afternoon Myra had come in out of a cold rain, pale from fatigue and depression and damp about the ankles, the glow with which she had started out on her quest snuffed out. That afternoon she had tried another

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set of offices. She had learned that surveyors and map-makers sometimes employed women. Some of the addresses she had took her down-town into narrow streets loomed over by sky-scrappers. The engineers' offices, as a general thing, were in the neighborhood of the real-estate offices. Here she had more apparent success, for she sometimes saw the employers themselves. She went into some queer places. One broad, unhealthily red-faced man, who was alone in a small office plastered with maps, examined Myra and her drawings with interest. He studied her with a full gaze, with eyes prominent and a little bloodshot.

"Yes, I sometimes use girls," he said. "I've had a man lately, but he didn't show up this morning." He "sized" Myra up—and down. "Haven't been looking for a job long, have you?" he inquired.

"For several days." She met his look gravely. "What do you pay?"

"Well, that depends. I can't tell till I've seen you work. Ever done any drafting?"

Myra had answered in the negative.

"Well, you'll need instruction. But you can draw, all right. It's not too late. Want to work on trial the rest of the afternoon?"

Myra hesitated. She would have liked mightily to discover just what was required of a draftsman. But the small, untidy, stale-smelling room, and the vulgar man who had come close to her, repelled her.

"You employ only one draftsman?" she asked in her cool, sweet tones.

"That's all. We'd get along all right, my dear." He had put his hand on her shoulder.

Myra drew back hastily. "It will be best for me to come in the morning."

The man laughed. "Just as you like. . . . When you've pawned that fur you may not be so top-loftical."

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Myra went down to the street with hot cheeks. Better some one's kitchen than that! She felt a little ill. It must be hard for those who were driven by the Great Necessity. It was raining now, and in a few moments, and in spite of her umbrella, she was damp about the knees. She could do no more that day. She went on between the looming buildings, passing, on her way, inclosed in a rope-surrounded space, a jostling, interweaving crowd of men in glistening oilskins, some of them making unintelligible signs to watchers at the windows above. Now and then a man dived out of the crowd and crossed her path, and she had a glimpse under down-drawn hat of a face in which the vertical line between the brows was either incipient or strongly marked, an expression that narrowed the eyes to keenness.

Myra had not the faintest idea of what the scene meant, and in spite of her wet ankles had paused for a moment to watch. She had gone on for half a block in bewilderment, until, with the desire to learn too strong in her for postponement, she had stepped under the huge arched entrance of a sky-scraper and asked a bent-shouldered old man who was running a mop over the wet, foot-marked tiling of the hall what it meant. He had looked at her with the filmed gaze of the aged, eyes rimmed with red lids.

"Them? Curb brokers," he said, not pausing in his monotonous backward and forward movements.

Myra went on, her feet a little more leaden with depression. How little she knew, and here she was attempting to compete with those whom generations of "business" had made apt. It was a man's "job" she was in search of. She realized why to such as her father her assertion that she meant to become self-supporting appeared comic.

She had moved about listlessly in her small room that the rain-dimmed window made unusually forlorn, taking



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off her wet things and wrapping herself in a bed-gown. Her throat was sore, too sore to swallow with comfort, so she had a raw egg and tea, and after putting her cold feet in hot water to renew circulation she bolstered herself on the couch, watching with vague eyes the lights of Broadway that the rivulets chasing each other down the window-panes made wavering, a more than usually drunken riot.

If she could find no opening as a draftswoman, would it not be best to take the usual six months' course in stenography? It would mean eating into her capital, but it would give her a chance. She had always been nimble and accurate with her fingers. . . . There was a letter from her mother on the table, begging her to come home. Her father was in California; he would not be there to object. Poor Mrs. Milenberg's frightened, incoherent letters had been pitiful. Myra had answered them with pages of love and reassurance. She had written daily, but to-night she could not write; she was too utterly "down."

And for the first time she was lonely. There was not a soul in that great city who realized that she was there. In three weeks she had not exchanged a word with any one to whom she was anything but a negligible quantity. She was an atom among several million hurrying atoms. Myra had thought more than once of Janniss and Alyth; but a sense of the fitness of things had withheld her; the sense that had helped to make her socially successful. Where was her reliance upon her own ability? Was she at the outset going to appeal for help to a man? Alyth might find something for her to do; he had influence. But she shrank from the appeal. Better to go her own way unaided.

Before Myra made her couch into a bed for the night she took the creased and scratched list that had been her companion for some days, and conned over the offices

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she had not visited. There were several as yet untried, enough to fill a morning; better to make one more attempt before looking up business schools.

Anton Hosbrock's was the last name on the list. If Myra had known anything of the architects of the city she would have visited his office among the first. As it was, she reached it at about noon, encountering at the door a small, black-eyed girl whom she afterward discovered was the stenographer, on her way to lunch. Chance had forestalled the office-boy; for some reason he was not visible, and Myra rapidly made her request.

The girl looked her over keenly, then with a demure expression turned about and led her through the reception-room and across the hall to the door of a large room in which some six or eight men were at work. She pointed out a tall, gray man. "Ask him," she said, and disappeared.

"Mr. Hosbrock wants a draftsman, yes," he answered, sharply, when Myra made her request. His emphasis made his meaning apparent enough. He was sallow and had shaggy brows; he looked down on Myra with a scowl.

In spite of his fierceness Myra liked him. She smiled at him. As usual when making her request the color came in her cheeks, making her lovely; the fact that she was tired and her eyes heavy made her flush appear the brighter. The very short young man at the nearest table was staring widely at her. Myra was conscious that they were all looking at her.

"Possibly if I could talk to Mr. Hosbrock, and he could see my work, he might consent to take a woman," Myra persisted.

"Not in this office!" he snapped. "A man can't make his bread these days, with babies like you crowding around and gobbling up his work. Go get married, child!" and he turned his back on her.

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There was a general titter and the very short young man laughed outright. It brought the blood still more hotly to Myra's face, pricked her into determination. This was the only place where she had discovered a vacancy. But she could not talk to the head draftsman's back. She went back as she had come, and found the stenographer playing with her gloves and looking amused.

"Couldn't I see Mr. Hosbrock for just a moment?" Myra begged.

The girl looked at Myra with a sudden return to gravity. She shook her head. "That's the head draftsman was talking. Better give it up."

As Myra turned away a twist of paper was thrust into her muff. The short young man had just passed her, carrying a blue-print into an inner room. Myra examined it as soon as she left the office. "Come this afternoon at half past two; Markham's out then. Just tell the office-boy that you want to see Mr. Hosbrock. Say you have business with him. See? Don't tell the boy what."

Perhaps if Myra had not been whirled upward in the elevator at half past two beside a tall, broad-shouldered man who took surreptitious note of her her honesty would have earned defeat at the office-boy's hands. She followed a pace behind the man as he went on to the office door, and stood hesitating when he let himself in. He looked at her with interest. "Did you want to see Mr. Hosbrock?" he asked, pleasantly, in a somewhat sonorous voice.

"Yes—on business—" Myra said, clinging with some embarrassment to her instructions.

"I am Mr. Hosbrock. Please come in."

He led her past the office-boy, through the reception-room, and into a splendidly lighted room, evidently his private office. Myra was uncomfortable under his smile and the pleased alacrity with which he offered her a chair. He evidently mistook her errand, but here was her chance;



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she had, at any rate, gained an audience. Myra collected all her bravery; her color rose, and her eyes dilated, as always when agitated.

"Is there something we can do for you?" Mr. Hosbrock asked. Myra noted that he had a well-favored face, distinguished by a white mustache and goatee, and that his utterance was measured and impressive.

With some embarrassment Myra explained her errand.

Anton Hosbrock's brows lifted, and the smile left his face. He surveyed Myra for a moment, a glance that swept her from hat to shoes, lingering a little on the fur that muffled her. Then his face became expressionless. He sat down at his desk, looking at her very steadily—at her face now. "I suppose you have done such work before?"

Myra confessed that she had not. "But I have studied drawing for several years. I am apt with my pencil. I think with a little instruction I should be able to do the simpler things; I know something of architectural drawing already." She offered her roll of drawings.

Hosbrock looked them over deliberately, then set them aside and looked again at Myra. "You have been studying art here, then?" he remarked. "Is your home here?"

"No."

"But you are not a stranger?"

Myra disliked this line of questioning, but she had come prepared. "I have not been long in New York," she said, reservedly. "If it is a possible thing I should like now to get a position."

He threw out a little encouragement. "You draw well—er— I don't think you gave me your name. Did you?"

"Myra St. Claire—"

"A pretty name," he returned, relaxing into a smile,

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but the curve of Myra's lips was so perfunctory that he dropped again into ponderous gravity. "Up to a week ago business has been very dull, but I have had some unexpected Western orders. . . . I might possibly be able to use you."

"I would try to give satisfaction," Myra said, brightening.

"If you will leave your address, your full name, please, my stenographer will communicate with you. Possibly you can be reached by telephone. Of course I cannot tell what your services are worth until I have tested you; say two or three days on trial. . . . You expect that, of course? And that you can't be well paid in the beginning?"

"Yes." Myra wrote her hotel address. She felt certain he meant to make inquiries; she was experienced enough to know that his air of indifference covered curiosity.

He glanced at the address she gave him, and Myra saw the involuntary lift of his brows. "*Mrs. St. Claire—and—er—Hotel Cyril. . . . Ah, I see; you are married, then? Is Mr. St. Claire with you?*"

Myra breathed freely. It had occurred to her that possibly he suspected who she was. But so far she evidently had not that complication to fear. She decided that it was best to be frank. "No," she said, quietly, "I am living alone."

"Divorced?" he asked, smilingly.

Myra grew hot to her finger-tips. It was difficult to meet such questioning. "I have separated from my husband," she answered, briefly.

Hosbrock did not apologize. "I see," he said, "and so you are looking for work. . . . It is not usual for me to employ a woman in this capacity, but as I said, you draw well. In any case my stenographer will communicate with you." Myra's fur had slipped from her shoulders,

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and he lifted it and put it about her, his hand touching her hot cheek as he did so. It was done deliberately, and Myra knew it.

She went out with mixed feelings. Anton Hosbrock and the broad, red-faced man were not so very unlike at heart, she thought. Happily she was neither ignorant nor in want. She had no intention of forgoing a position because there were difficulties in store for her. Mr. Anton Hosbrock might meet his match! . . . Then Myra cooled to the hope that she had secured work, and of the kind she liked. She felt she could make herself worthy of her hire.

Late in the afternoon the stenographer's pert voice informed her that she might report in the morning. Myra thanked her and turned from the telephone with flushed cheeks. She spent the evening overhauling her wardrobe and writing to her mother. There was also a letter from St. Claire that she must answer. It contained the usual request that she return to him, couched in platitudes that made Myra's lips set in a straight line. There was also a check inclosed that she must return; St. Claire was keeping well on the side of the law. Myra wondered how many times she had repeated her reasons for denying him. She would not do it again, she decided. She wrote across his letter, "It is useless. Why do you write?" and returned it, together with the check.

To her mother Myra wrote a long letter. Among other things she said: "I think I have secured work as draftswoman in an architect's office. It is very unlikely that there I shall meet any one I know. Stop grieving, please, mother dear, and give me encouragement instead, for I need it. I shall have my trials, of course, but I am not in the least daunted. As soon as I know whether my position is to be permanent, perhaps you will send some of the pretty things from my room in New Rome. I know you will like packing a box for me."



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Myra was not mysterious about her occupation, for she was very certain that her father was well aware of her movements. She wondered hotly whether he would attempt to dislodge her from her hard-won position. He had a long arm, her father.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE next morning Myra was taken first to Hosbrock's room. He was business-like in his greeting. "Ready to begin, I see. . . . Come with me and I'll have Markham start you. . . . Just leave your things here. I shall want to see you before you go this evening."

Myra obeyed him in silence. She was too tense over her new venture to be keenly observant; but the sensation created when she entered the drafting-room with her employer was too marked to escape even her preoccupation. As they passed the stenographer's room the click of her machine stopped abruptly, and in the drafting-room every man stared at her, the head draftsman with a brow as black as a thunder-cloud. The men were getting to their tables amid the usual chatter that preceded work, an exchange of chaff, and comments, and with those who were garrulous a recital of the night before. The short young man's somewhat raucous voice was distinctly audible. At sight of Myra he stopped dead, choking into silent laughter, and in the sudden stillness Myra was given a table somewhat apart from the others.

Hosbrock turned then to the head draftsman, looking steadily into the man's angry eyes while he gave his instructions. They were received in a hot silence more expressive than words. On his concluding sentences Hosbrock's voice rose.

"There are no distinctions in this office, remember! Man or woman, I require good work, and I'll not tolerate

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*unfairness.*" He whirled from his head draftsman's clouded brow to the short young man's smiling observation of Myra—"or *foolishness!*" As he passed before his stenographer his mustache lifted in a slight smile, which she returned reservedly.

He left a chastened silence behind him. Myra was burning with discomfort, particularly when Markham, by the curtness of his instructions, plainly showed his antagonism. He set her to tracing full-size details, and scowled the more heavily when he discovered that she was apt; that she was capable really of doing more advanced work. His criticisms, therefore, were acid. The short young man, whose name Myra learned was Brent, evinced an interest in her that was as embarrassing. When Markham left the room for a few moments he came to Myra's table.

"I knew you'd get taken," he whispered, wisely, then gave Myra some suggestions about her drawing that proved very useful.

She received them in a guarded manner, but that did not deter Mr. Brent. Throughout the day, every time he passed her table he had a whispered word for her. From the glances he bent on her Myra decided that he was highly susceptible; a voluble, conceited, but probably good-hearted youth, highly elated by this covert display of an acquaintance that the other fellows must envy. He was an exceedingly good draftsman, that Myra discovered at once. His suggestions were most useful; still it did not add to her peace of mind to find that Markham noticed his conduct with an access of rage.

The truth was that the elderly draftsman had a violent grudge against the new order. Woman was invading man's battle-field, and not only did she fight well, but she used her wiles to aid her in the struggle. Such an exhibition of her power as he was forced to endure just now



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was intolerable. He was utterly disgusted. He had worked a number of years for Anton Hosbrock, and had certain ideals regarding his province. He had been ready to choke with rage the evening before when Hosbrock had informed him that he meant to take on this girl. It was the first time his employer had utilized the drafting-room to further an affair with a woman. It wasn't a thing that was done; it was outrageous! And of course Brent, as good a draftsman as ever was, but in other respects an ass, would fall a victim to such a face as this girl possessed and be ejected by Hosbrock. She was enough to demoralize the whole place. Damn it—there wasn't a man in the room who didn't radiate self-consciousness! He was seething with a rage and disgust that was all the more bitter because there was no doubt that the girl could draw unusually well and was going to make a good draftswoman, and his innate honesty would compel him to tell Hosbrock so.

When evening came Myra was exhausted. She had an intolerable backache, for she had stood most of the day and had worked tensely, so much so that as the day went on she forgot everything but what she was doing.

From inexperience she was slow in getting her materials put away, so she was the last to leave the office—last but one. The door of Hosbrock's room was open, and when she hurried in she found him there.

"Well, how did it go?" he inquired.

Myra was haggard with weariness and depression. If the head draftsman's report of her had been as scathing as his criticisms of her mistakes, she was not destined for a second day of trial.

"It is difficult for me to tell. I felt that I was slow, but in that respect I will improve. . . . I am afraid I did not satisfy Mr. Markham."

Hosbrock unbent in a smile. "It happens to be Hosbrock, and not Markham, whose opinion counts here,"

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he said, with a touch of the pompous that did not sit ill upon him. "Don't let my head draftsman discompose you, Mrs. St. Claire. You have done good work for a beginner."

Myra grew pink with relief. "Thank you."

As the day before, he took her fur and put it about her lingeringly. "It is too bad there is no cross-town car that will take you home," he said, solicitously. "You are tired out; you are not used to standing." Then, as if struck by a happy thought, "My automobile is here and I am going across to Broadway. Why not let me drop you at your hotel?"

There was no hesitation in Myra's answer. "You are very kind, but I have several errands before I can start home."

Hosbrock did not urge. He was a man of much experience. He considered himself a successful man with women. Myra had struck him as entirely out of the ordinary, the product of some unusual set of circumstances. His inquiries had not enlightened him particularly. That Myra was very apparently a lady, and without acquaintances in the city, was all he had been able to learn at her address. She was well-bred, certainly, and, Hosbrock judged, not without decided experience of the world. The point upon which he felt certainty was that she was in financial straits. She was not the first woman who had come to New York with a trunkful of clothes and had her income fail her. She was evidently no weakling, however. Anton Hosbrock had tested most situations; here was something temptingly out of the ordinary. And the entertaining thing was that she had real aptitude for just the kind of work he had to give her. The offer of his automobile was largely tentative.

And Myra knew that it was. She understood Anton Hosbrock very well—far better than he understood her. He had a little of St. Claire's unalterable conception of

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himself as a conqueror of women. It was a conviction that appeared to be deeply implanted in the masculine breast, Myra reflected. Doubtless a necessary attribute so long as the human male remained a predatory animal.

Too weary to do anything but lie on her couch and look out at the nightly show, Myra pondered her situation. She meant to stay at Hosbrock's, but to do so she must walk carefully. The first requisite was that she prove her capability. The second that she dominate the situation. To young Brent Myra gave only a passing thought. The stenographer, Miss Fay, was a clever little thing. Markham Myra liked; he was the only person in the office she did like. He was sincere, and fairly intelligent. As she proved herself, so would she be regarded by him; his prejudice would wear off. The other men did not count.

Myra thought long of her employer. He had aroused her antagonism, the same cool judgment that had condemned St. Claire. He had taken her into his office for other reasons than her efficiency. She had aroused his curiosity; he wanted to investigate her, and for his benefit. Myra had learned that men are rarely very intuitive. Hosbrock had no very clear impression of her; he was relying on her financial inability, just as her father and St. Claire were. It was deep-rooted, that sense of superiority—man, the breadwinner, over woman, the bread-consumer. It deprived her of pleasure in her accomplishment, this feeling that she had been favored because of the universal attraction that had beneath it the usual sex-antagonism. Was it necessary, this continual sex-battle? Myra turned her face to the pillow; she was weary and disillusioned enough to weep.

She carried a tranquil face to the office the next morning, however. To say that Myra worked absorbedly that day is scarcely doing her justice. Nothing more utterly intent on accomplishment had ever entered the place. She was



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not nervous as on the first day. Markham's curtness made no impression whatever on her; as a personality, apparently, he did not exist. Her effort was simply to grasp and then carry out his instructions. He studied her with curiosity as the day passed, forgetting to scowl. Brent's attentions were so absently received that his feelings were hurt. He sighed frequently over his work, then cleared his throat defiantly. During the latter part of the day he refused to look at his protégée. Miss Fay, whose desk commanded a view of the drafting-room, glanced frequently and amusedly in Myra's direction. The half-dozen draftsmen lost their self-consciousness; she was "some class," that girl, whoever she might be. She wasted no glances on them, and worked like a house afire.

Myra had come early that second morning purposely to have a word with the little stenographer. "Where do you keep your wraps, Miss Fay?" she inquired, pleasantly. "May I put my things with yours?"

Miss Fay indicated a corner cupboard. "Sure," she said, and added, demurely, "They mayn't be so safe as in Mr. Hosbrock's room, though."

Myra was not to be drawn. "What is safe enough for you will be safe enough for me," she answered, practically.

Then she had gone to her task and become oblivious to every one, even to Mr. Hosbrock when he came in. She did not see him until he stopped at her table. He examined her work, spending some time over it.

"I believe you can do detailing next week," he said, then. "Come to my room for a moment before you leave this evening." It was his announcement to the office that Myra was permanently engaged.

On his departure Brent heaved so profound a sigh that it amounted to a groan. Markham, whose rage had reached the explosive point, turned on him savagely.

"If you must make such ridiculous noises, why don't

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you go into the hall to do it? Whenever there's anything feminine around you snort and puff and amble like a love-sick rhinoceros!"

Brent descended from his stool in high dudgeon. "I'm not here to be insulted!" he declared, with heat. "I have passed over several such remarks of yours, Mr. Markham, but this last is too much. You'll answer to me for this, sir! I demand an apology!" He was very red in the face, very short, almost a dwarf beside Markham's six feet, very grandiose, and, as Markham had said, ridiculous. The others were in subdued glee over the scene—little Brent was such an egregious bore! After one swift glance Myra was oblivious.

Markham had his comment. "For all the world like a bunch of stags and one deer!" he said, under his breath. His irritation had vanished. He looked amusedly at the little man from beneath his shaggy brows. "All right, Brent," he said. "I'm sorry. I apologize. You're so susceptible to colds, and people with colds get on my nerves. You ask that very pretty girl I saw you with at the theater what to do for it. She looked as if she thought a lot of you, Brent. . . . To my mind that's the sort of thing a woman's meant for: to look after a man and children and a home—not trying to elbow him in business. As for the kind that uses her face to get her a place—well, she has herself to blame if she gets a tumble." Markham knew that speech might lose him his place, but for the life of him he could not refrain.

Brent was mollified. He was, as Markham knew, impervious to sarcasm. In his own estimation he was decidedly a "lady-killer." It was just as well his ungrateful protégée should realize that he went to the theater with pretty girls who looked adoringly at him.

"Very well," he said, mounting his stool with dignity. "We will not refer to the matter again." And the office settled into quiet. For one whole hour Brent said not

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a word—an extraordinary thing for him, Myra afterward learned.

Hosbrock was succinct that evening. Myra found herself engaged at a salary that amounted to fifteen dollars a month less than Hosbrock had ever paid any man in his office, the percentage, Myra discovered, she must pay for being a woman. But she had work, that was the important thing, and she applied herself to it with such determination that even Brent, who rarely thought for three consecutive minutes of anybody but himself, was impressed. Markham ceased his gibes, as Myra had known he would. She had neither glances nor smiles for any one in the office, least of all for her employer. And Markham decided that it was not an assumed indifference. But the crucial test was that after a few days' experience she did excellent work. He could find no flaws in it. In time he felt he might even take a kindly view of her.

Miss Fay was the only person in the office with whom Myra really conversed. They frequently helped each other on with their wraps. It was she who characterized their employer.

"Gay on the sly—and chesty," she said, nodding wisely. "Ever notice how many of them are like that when they've married for money? His wife's *rich*. . . I've been working in offices for seven years, and I've been through the mill—known dozens like *him*, and dozens of girls who work men like him. I've learned a thing or two, and none of it for mine! . . . I'm engaged now to a fellow who doesn't make much more than I do, and two can't marry on that. What's the good of our waiting on and on? We're pretty well suited. I'm proposing going into partnership, marrying, and I work and he work; then we can both have a home. . . But, you know, I'm having my own time making him see it that way! Funny how men think the thing for them to do is to take you and house you,



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and feed you, and put clothes on you, instead of helping you to be independent. Still, that's what most girls are after—getting themselves taken care of—so one can't blame the men." Miss Fay nodded emphatically. "I know one thing, though. The girls and the fellows 'll have to come to a different understanding if there's much marrying going to be done. The town's running over with men who can't marry unless the girls will go halves. Me and my boy we're in love with each other, all right, though, and I'll bring him around to my way of thinking by and by."

The little stenographer interested Myra; so did Markham, and to a certain extent her employer. She had played hostess to many a man like Anton Hosbrock; she was simply seeing him from another angle. And Myra had made a discovery about herself. She liked the contact with the business world. She understood much better the fascination it had for men like her father and St. Claire. There was a cutthroat activity about the money-battle that appealed to the piratic in man. Had women the same instinct, she wondered, only dormant because of disuse?

But she had a more sympathetic understanding of the passion to accomplish as she had seen it in Alyth and Janniss, the pure delight in accomplishment for accomplishment's sake. She was beginning to love her work. But the evenings were dreary. Better than the wretched evenings at Woodmansie Place, but dreary. After a few disagreeable experiences she decided to keep off the street; there could be no sight-seeing for her after dark. Then she was tempted to call up either Janniss or Alyth. She had the instinctive knowledge that either would come quickly. But a certain other instinct restrained her. She did not feel sure enough of her position; she was new to independence. She did not feel that she could say with sufficient assurance, "See, here am I accomplish-

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ing as you are, a working-woman as you are working-men, a comrade," not an adorable woman on canvas, as Janniss had always visioned her, or a restless, unhappy woman, as she had been revealed to Alyth. To Janniss she was a very feminine vision of the old order, and to Alyth the indeterminate woman of the new order. She was not quite ready to explain herself.

Her school friends Myra did not even consider. There was not one of them who would understand. There was no woman whom she had known to whom she felt drawn. Though Myra did not define it, it was masculine companionship she craved, the hunger of the woman for the man, and its prompting the passion that had drawn Dick to her breast and whispered in his ear her desire. She regarded women a little vaguely, with kindness and with sympathy, but not so clearly as she visioned men. There was a need in her for the one and not for the other.

Still she held back from the telephone, for there was the inevitable struggle with her father pending. There was no telling how long she would have a roof over her head. He might force her to move on. Myra felt by no means secure, and still less so when one day Hosbrock made a change that daunted her. The office was working upon plans for residences to be built in a subdivision near Chicago. Hosbrock seemed to regard this order as very important, Myra guessed because much future work depended upon the way he handled it. There was much detailing to be done under his supervision, he told the office, and for convenience' sake he wanted her for a day or two to work in his room.

Myra acquiesced without comment, leaving the surcharged atmosphere of the drafting-room with head high and hot cheeks. She had not expected such a move as this. When Hosbrock followed her she was still flushed. She received his instructions attentively, however, and

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set to work, quite oblivious of the meaningful look he gave her.

It was evident, as the day passed, that they were to stand side by side frequently, her shoulder touching his breast when he examined her work. It was plain that to avoid the intimacy of touch and glance was going to be almost impossible. She would have to work under a double strain—keep a man who was determined to encroach at a distance, and at the same time do good work.

Except for the fire that edged her lowered lashes, Myra showed no sign of her hot irritation. Hosbrock probably sensed her anger; at any rate, he kept his distance. Miss Fay's knowing look when Myra went in for her wraps did not improve Myra's temper, and the cool glance Markham bestowed upon her hurt. If he had scowled at her Myra would have cared far less.

She carried her perturbation home with her. She was both disgusted and angry. The situation was hateful. Then, as usual with her, anger settled into stubborn resistance. Because Hosbrock took a mistaken view, was she to abandon a position that she could fill capably? Given time, she could do just as good work as Brent. It had occurred to Myra that there was an opening for her in interior decoration. Hosbrock usually turned that part of his work over to some firm of decorators, but there was a certain amount he attempted himself. . . . She would not be driven from it.

But she could not risk plain speech, unless too much provocation should be given her. Her power of resistance was quite as strong as his capacity for encroachment. And as the days passed she did hold her own. She was utterly unresponsive. She gave only polite attention when Hosbrock remarked on the muscular development of his arms, the breadth of his chest, and the width of his shoulders.

"I have always been an athlete," he told her. "Gray



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hairs really have nothing to do with age, you know. . . . How old do you suppose I am?"

He had much to say of Anton Hosbrock. Myra was sorely tempted to play upon his conceit—it would have been so easy. But she refrained.

Before the week was out he had told her that he was unhappily married. Myra had just freed herself from his sudden embrace, and with a decision that made him recoil. She stood backed against the table, looking at him. What a fool he was! She longed to tell him so in a brief sentence. As it was her wide look made her appear little else than startled, so he tried another method.

"Forgive me," he said, in a depressed way. He dropped into his desk-chair with a somewhat theatrical abandon, and supported his well-shaped head in his hand. "You are such a tremendously attractive woman. There is so much warmth and intelligence about you that I have been irresistibly drawn. You are wonderful. From the first moment I looked into your eyes I have been your captive. . . . You don't understand, of course. I *have* made my struggle, but I have been forced into a restrained existence. . . . To tell the truth, my wife and I—we are only so in name; there is no sympathy between us. Naturally, I crave sympathy. You possibly have suffered much as I have—you must understand."

"Yes, I think I do," Myra said, evenly. "It is hard sometimes to adjust life as we should like—to retain a fortune, for instance, and indulge in 'sympathy' at the same time. To serve both God and Mammon successfully appears to be a feat as difficult of accomplishment in marriage as in business."

Anton Hosbrock was by no means a stupid man. In his profession he was unusually intelligent, original in his conceptions, and with feeling for the beautiful. But his opinion of women was simply of the current, hand-me-down variety. Myra had pricked him somewhat sharply.

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He studied her alertly enough now from beneath his tragically clasped brow. . . . The little devil! She was as shrewd and as clever as they were made—that was evident! She made him appear a fool, and he flushed much more hotly from injured conceit than he had from emotion.

He rose. "I could explain, but what is the use?" he said, gravely. "I see that I do not appeal to you. I had hoped that we might be friends. You certainly have attracted me greatly." He felt that he was carrying the matter off fairly well—saving his dignity. Inwardly he was thoroughly angry; her independence needed chastening, and perhaps she would get it! She was hard up and anxious to keep her place.

Myra knew that he was angry. As soon as an excuse could be found she would probably be discharged. She would be made to pay for her sarcasm. "I have certainly wished to please you—as an employer," she answered, pacifically. "I want to do good work."

"I don't happen to be *the man*, that's all," he returned, coldly.

Myra made no answer, and a heavy silence settled upon them. It was not broken until Hosbrock gave her some curt instructions. He had adopted quite another manner, that Myra knew would also have its trials for her. And it did not lighten her spirits when accidentally she discovered that the very plans upon which she was working were to be submitted to her father. The order was from him. What a complication! He had been delayed in San Francisco, but he might appear any day now. She seemed to be encompassed by more than her share of difficulties.

Myra went home that night in a state of disgust. And there was nothing there to enliven her except the dizzy show of Broadway. There recurred to her then the remark of the woman who had knelt to pin her dress: "Take us as a whole, we women who get out and do for ourselves, we're a lonely lot. There is no provision for us yet."

## CHAPTER XX

IT became very evident to Myra that whether discharged or not, at the end of the month she would have to go, for Hosbrock was making himself unendurable. He was curt, sharp in his demands for rapid work, and at other times heavily silent. Had Myra felt less contempt for the childish traits he displayed she would have been enraged. As it was she remained unmoved. An actual insult she would resent, and promptly, but apparently Hosbrock meant only to impress upon her the loss of his favor. He took two days in which to do it, and then, to her great relief, transferred her to the drafting-room, where she was curiously eyed. Whatever else the group of men had thought, they now very certainly considered her as good as discharged.

It lacked but a few days of the end of the month, when she was certain to be told to go, probably by a line inclosed in the envelope that would contain her month's salary. Hosbrock had ceased to speak to her. He was oblivious of her except when she brought work to him, and then he declined to look at her. Because she bore with him he probably thought her penniless, and that at any moment she might break down and sue for favor. That even if she did hold out for those three days, when actually discharged she would yield. Myra set her teeth and worked on; she did not mean to jeopardize her month's salary. The hard thing was that she would have to face her father with the sense of failure eating away at her courage.



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On the last day of the month she waited tensely for the hour of check-distribution. Hosbrock had his own methods: at noon he entered the drafting-room and laid an envelope on every table—but her own. He passed her by silently, leaving her to surprise and accelerated heart-beats. Did he mean to call her into his room later on and give himself the satisfaction of dismissing her orally? . . . But in a few moments he left the office, and did not return that day.

Myra went home nonplussed, and it was only after considerable thought that the explanation occurred to her. He meant to give her a night of anxiety, worry her into seeking an interview humbled in spirit. The meanness of the device aroused Myra. Suppose she were penniless—dependent on the pay of one week to meet the expenses of the next, like most of the girls who morning and evening streamed by her? And as ignorant as many? It would worry such a girl terribly. . . . He intended to pay her, of course, but in his own time and way.

Myra sat long that night, thinking, keenly conscious of the city's traffic that even midnight did not still. She was being taught that it was a hand-to-hand conflict out there, with all sorts of weapons, and no quarter given. And a woman had somewhat the worst of it. . . . If only she could hold her position in spite of Hosbrock—at any rate until a higher power, her father, appeared. That was a struggle always looming above her.

And yet Myra hated to use the weapon that lay at her hand; she had so great an advantage over the down-in-the-heel girls who passed her daily that it seemed an inexcusable unfairness. Whenever a group of garment-workers passed her Myra remembered that in the string of manufactories that Milenberg controlled were hundreds of girls, and that the bill St. Claire was lobbying through the legislature was aimed to protect a monopoly. Her father was using his money to fight the demands of labor.

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She had cast in her lot with those who toiled, and was being served their portion, and driven out of employment she would not be! Her fighting blood was up. She finally penned the letter her ingenuity evolved.

The next morning Myra went, as usual, to her table in the drafting-room. She had received no discharge; she would give Mr. Hosbrock the morning in which to conjecture. Myra was aware that when he came in he paused to eye her curiously. He was in and out of the room all morning. She went on with her work as usual. At lunch-time she placed her letter on his desk, reading it over again before she did so:

MR. ANTON HOSBROCK:

DEAR SIR,—I regret the necessity of reminding you that my month's salary is overdue. This neglect on your part must be owing to some explainable mistake, since you have repeatedly told me that you were satisfied with my work, and have given proof of the fact by retaining me in your employ. If you will kindly rectify your oversight, you will oblige,

Yours respectfully,

MYRA ST. CLAIRE.

There is a circumstance I do not like to mention, as I have taken a certain pride in showing my father that I could provide for myself without his assistance. I wanted to discover what were the opportunities for a woman in an architect's office. I have learned much that is interesting. I suppose the more usual mode of procedure would have been to have informed you when I first came that James Milenberg, of Chicago, is my father. He has, as you know, been detained in California longer than he intended, but I expect now, any day, to see him.

M. ST. C.

Striking from behind her father's money. It was that fact that deprived Myra of any feeling of satisfaction. The postscript, though an irresistible concession to her sense of humor, made her feel small. Still, it was the

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mention of her father that would prevent her discharge, and she had thrown aside certain compunctions. She must use what weapons she possessed. She was in to win.

After lunch Myra saw Hosbrock pass through the hall on the way to his room. She had calculated that he would take some time for consideration. But not so. Even the curses he probably bestowed on her must have been brief, for in less than an hour's time he sent her in a note. He wrote:

DEAR MRS. ST. CLAIRE,—Thank you for calling my attention to an inexcusable oversight. It is not the only thing for which I shall always feel regret. Please find inclosed check for a month's salary.

Your work has been most satisfactory, and in my opinion shows great promise. It has long been my wish to extend my facilities for interior decoration. I think I once remarked that that was my wish. I have noticed a natural aptitude on your part for that line of work. It would be an opening for you at a better salary, or, if you prefer to connect yourself with some firm that makes interior decoration a specialty, I think I may be of assistance. I shall be glad to serve you in any way. It would give me pleasure to talk the matter over with your father.

Yours very sincerely,

ANTON HOSBROCK.

Myra felt no elation. She had won because she possessed an advantage. It was plain that unless, when necessary, she fought, and skilfully, she could not climb the ladder of success. That aspect of the life she had chosen was distasteful; as distasteful as social competition had been. But there was the other—the joy of accomplishment, the eagerness to excel, to perfect. It was that that exhilarated. The greatest satisfaction Myra felt when she put away the interior upon which she was working was that she did not have to part with it.

Myra went home that evening tired, but not unhappy. When she entered the hotel she was given a distinct sur-



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prise. A bell-boy directed her attention to a waiting visitor. Seated on the edge of one of the huge gilt-backed chairs that graced the hotel corridor, rigidly upright, was a little figure incased in velvet and topped by a hat as gay as the crest of a bright-plumaged bird. Her silver-fox-lined automobile coat had slipped from her shoulders and hung to the floor—Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice.

Through her lorgnette the little lady was taking note of the somewhat depressing surroundings—the scanty office, the ugly marble, the pasty-faced, unstarched-looking bell-boys. When Myra came in she was watching a group of theater men and women who were making their way to the elevator. Leaning against the office counter was a man in pronounced waistcoat and spats, an open-gazing, wine-reddened man, the cheaper type of the man-about-town. He had straightened when Myra entered, watchful of her movements, with, as Myra knew, the intention of ascending in the same elevator with herself. He was on her floor, and for a week had timed his evening ascensions to correspond with her own—possibly for the pleasure of observing her lowered lashes and slightly compressed lips.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had turned her lorgnette upon him next, then, following his gaze, she came upon Myra, who stood arrested.

“Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice!” she said, coming forward.

Her visitor rose with an alacrity that youth might have envied. “At last!” she exclaimed in honest English. “My dear, remove me quickly to some place where I can explode in safety! I am like to die of an apoplexy!”

Myra flushed, but she also laughed. “Come up with me to my room; there you can say what you please.”

In the elevator Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice maintained an expressive silence, possibly because the man with the loud waistcoat had also entered. But when Myra’s door had closed on them her tongue was loosed.

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"Myra St. Claire, *what* are you doing *here*? . . . It was Adele who let it out. I came in this morning on the *Imperator*. I've been everywhere in Europe and not in Paris this summer, so I hadn't even heard of your illness. Adele is in New York, and evidently was on the watch for me—for she is a bit afraid of me and wanted to say a good word for herself before some enemy forestalled her—so I had no more than gotten the pajamas off the chairs than she telephoned. I wanted her to give an account of herself, so I asked her to tea, and of course I inquired about you. You had been ill, she said, and at your father's, and St. Claire was in Washington. I know Adele so well—she was too offhand in her remarks—I knew there was something back of it, so I proceeded to make her angry by intimating that she was in pursuit of Justin, and out it all came: that you had left Justin and were here in New York, and that you wanted a divorce. Then by applying the thumbscrews I extracted your address from her. I dismissed Adele, and in two minutes I had out the car. I waited a half-hour for you down there. . . . What does it all mean, my dear?"

While Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had been talking Myra was moving about, placing pillows behind her visitor, lighting the shaded lamp, removing her hat and coat. Mrs. Milenberg had sent some of Myra's possessions, so the little place no longer looked forlorn. It had Myra's characteristic touches of warmth and color. When Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice concluded Myra drew a chair to the couch and sat down.

"Do you need to ask?" she said, gravely.

"Oh, I know, my dear, I know! Doubtless you have had provocation—I believe in charity to women—the same charity men extend to each other. Adele, of course, wants to marry Justin—she has always wanted it. But in spite of the fact that Justin's left hand never knows what his right is doing, he is used to steering his boat

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safely among such shoals. I know my dear cousin Justin very well—I have known him for some forty years. He has no idea of marrying Adele. But it is a hope she has never been able to relinquish. I noticed her performances at Woodmansie Place. Of course it was she who precipitated the break? I roundly accused her of it, and she turned quite white. If she is at the bottom of all this mess I shall make her rue it! I have always stood by Adele; she has been more sinned against than sinning. A little practical application of eugenics and she would never have been at all, poor soul, but I won't stand for pure deviltry. If—"

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had stopped because she was out of breath, giving Myra at last a chance to speak. Myra had long ago decided who it was who had sent the anonymous letter, but she bore Adele no grudge for that. That was a matter that rested with Adele's own conscience. Myra answered Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice as she had answered her father.

"No," she said, decidedly, "I have no complaint to make of any woman. I believe in charity to my own kind, also. My reasons can be covered in a sentence: I thought I had married an honest man; I could not go on living with a lie."

"It covers much, that answer of yours. I asked myself at Woodmansie Place, 'Was Justin mad to marry a woman like this, and expect to deceive her?' Women are not so easily deceived as they used to be, because they are not so determined not to see. . . . But, my dear, *why are you here*—and in such a place as this? It's that troubles me. Justin may be all sorts, still he will always know how to avoid scandal. But for you to court it like this!"

Myra looked at her in surprise. "What is wrong with this place? It is full of working-people, mostly, and quite as moral a lot on the whole as the collection in Woodmansie Place."



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"*Assurément!*" Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice exclaimed, irritably. "I find no morals anywhere—to-day I am more than ever convinced that in the form in which in my youth I made acquaintance with them they do not exist. The code is being so strenuously overhauled that every time-honored rule of conduct is standing on its head. So be it. Something or other will evolve out of it all, I suppose. By and by probably the old rules will have a larger amount of sense cuffed into them, and be set right side up again. Let us hope so. . . . But for you to come among such *canaille* as that odious person who ascended with us—it gives such a handle to the sensorious—" Again she stopped, either for breath or because of Myra's surprised and amused eyes.

"Don't abuse the man," Myra said. "What possible harm can he do me?" She reached and ran up the window-shade. "It's probably as you say of Adele, an admixture of non-eugenics, the lure of that dizzy dance out there, and the fluctuations of the ticker that are responsible for him. My chambermaid tells me he is a broker, and 'that generous a heart in him'! She is Irish and amusing. I listen to her on Sundays, wrapped up here on the couch, while she opens my windows and gives 'a slap' to my room. This place has interested me. I have been much happier here than I ever was at Woodmansie Place—and in spite of my difficulties. . . . Next to me is a theatrical couple. They have been married five years, the chambermaid tells me. Both are filling engagements. They return from the theater at midnight, and occasionally I have seen them from my bath-room window, having supper in their little sitting-room, she on his knee, eating a bread-and-cheese sandwich, and both drinking beer out of the same glass. A single bottle seems to suffice. They appear to get a vast deal of pleasure out of each other's society. They are mates, those two, and co-workers. And yet if any Woodmansie Place-ite met them in the hall

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she would be quite shocked at their pronounced appearance. . . . I came here, Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, because I have only a little money to tide me over until I earn some, and also because I didn't want questions asked me; but I have thought sometimes that it is a privilege to get this three-quarter view of life. In the office I am seeing life from still another angle—"

"In an office?" Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice interrupted.

"I am working. Didn't Adele inform you of that also? I came to New York to work."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice clapped her hands. "That explains it!" she cried. "It is economic independence you are after! . . . My dear, *why* didn't you tell me that at once! Here I have been consumed with anxiety over you! When I next see Adele I shall immerse her in boiling water!"

Myra guessed now the secret of Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's agitation. "Why—what reason did she give?"

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice hesitated. "The—usual one—"

"A man!" Myra said, with contempt. "Poor Adele! she sees everything from that angle!"

"It is Justin's explanation, also, *ma chère*."

"And he too sees from that angle. . . . I thought you knew me better?"

"I did not believe it, exactly—still, as I remarked, morals are on a holiday. We juggle so with matrimony these days. I was upset, so I came in hot haste. At Woodmansie Place I had formed the opinion that you were one of those destined to knock together the heads of all the little tin gods. I thought possibly you had made a lunge at them. I find you have taken a step I approve. . . . Tell me now the where and the how of this 'work' of yours?"

Myra told her in detail. She brought the recital down to the events of that day. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice bent to her, her eyes bright with interest. When Myra finished

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she straightened so abruptly that the bird-of-paradise feathers in her hat executed a curve.

"*Bon!*" she said. "Thirty years ago how I should have enjoyed making the plunge into independence!" Then she quieted as suddenly. "And what is your plan for the future?"

"I want to fit myself to be an interior decorator. I want father to give me enough to make that possible. I mean to support myself, finally, of course."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice nodded. She mused a moment with finger tapping an admirably made porcelain tooth. "That little hawk—your father—he will object. He will stand with Justin. Still, he is a wise little hawk, a deal wiser than Justin." She lifted keen eyes to Myra. "But, my little friend, that answer of yours is incomplete. What more in the future, eh?"

Myra flushed. "I want love—by and by."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice nodded again. "Yes; you are one of those who must have it. . . . It would sweeten existence a bit if you had it now—of the right kind—not of the kind I supposed when I came running here. . . . Tell me, deep in you is there not a suspicion of the ultimate man? Some one with whom you have touched hands, whose inclination is drawing you?"

Myra's wide look was hers to read. "Some one who loves *me*? . . . Certainly not! Who on earth would there be? . . . Don't force me to conclude that you are foolishly romantic as well as easily suspicious!" Myra spoke warmly, for she had not forgiven her visitor her doubts of her.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's fingers suddenly guarded lips that had twitched in a longing to smile. For one moment she was desperately afraid her eyes would betray her. Myra had quieted her anxiety, and she was inclined to be merry. A spirit of mischief well spiced with daring was far more natural to her than agitation. She loved to



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investigate, and to test, very frequently quite regardless of consequences. She liked Myra; she had been quite concerned for her, but, her fears quieted, her spirits had risen. She removed her hand from her lips.

"No; I'm not of Adele's mind," she said. "Far from it. I doubt if I am romantic, either. But love is sure to discover you one of these days, my little friend—best it should come from the right quarter. A determined man to grapple with your father and Justin—that would not be a bad thing."

Myra laughed at her, half in surprise and half in amusement. "You are a curious little lady."

"Am I not!" Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice agreed, brightly. "Well, let us dismiss the problematic knight and return to the practical. . . . I wish you out of this house. It is not the surrounding for you."

"It is the best I can afford," Myra returned, firmly. "Besides, I mean my father shall realize how completely in earnest I am. . . . I am not unhappy here."

"A dun-colored answer that—a thoroughly feminine answer. A man would say, 'Oh, I'm all right!' And he would be—as right as any male without a mate. He has all that out there open to him, a sedative at least to loneliness. But a woman!" She shrugged, grown suddenly grave. "I know something of loneliness. Loneliness does strange things to a woman, dear, and the woman who is alone is *lonely*. It is a far more potent subduer than starvation. It brought me to my knees once, ground my face in the dirt. I shall never forget the experience. I dread loneliness more powerfully than the plague. That is the reason I now run about the world and chatter so much. . . . To a woman of your temperament, when it takes hold upon her, loneliness is a ghastly thing, and here you cannot escape it. You will not ask your friends here. You have a deal of social sense like most people who feel superior to society, and I know you

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will not do it. But you cannot live entirely without people—no one can. . . . It will be difficult for you in any case, for you are an anomaly. The female anomaly is viewed askance, the male anomaly with romantic interest. It will be better to change your environment, so, my little friend, if I make it possible for you to live nearer me—you will come?"

It was the first helping hand that had been extended to Myra, and she *had* tasted loneliness in that little pocket-handkerchief of a room—somewhat poignantly when her window showed her the "co-partners" with arms about each other. The tears rose in her eyes, though she shook her head decidedly.

"No. . . . You are kind, but no one can fight my battle for me. I realize that I am an 'anomaly'—anomaly is a good word. I have already suffered as a result—but, Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, *anything* is better than Woodmanskie Place." Myra flushed hotly in conclusion.

"So you remain here?"

"Yes. I have no time for people—*people* can't fill one's heart."

"But you will accept—just a little loan?"

"No, my dear friend; I am not suffering."

"So be it, then. . . . But you can at least dine with me? . . . To-morrow—let it be to-morrow?"

"Certainly I will, and with pleasure," Myra answered, warmly.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice was standing, and now through her lorgnette she took a deliberate survey of the three-cornered space in which she was. Then she nodded in a reassured way. "You know, a man would think this quite charming—*à l'aise*. I have noticed that a man in love dislikes wide spaces. Else why do they always lead their ladies into corners, behind palms, and into bosky dells? A Russian—you will meet him this winter at my house—a charming man—once told me that he

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was quite alone for three days in the Desert of Sahara with a lady whom he adored. They had wandered from a caravan or something of the kind and became lost. And in all that three days he found it quite impossible to say a word of love. With foreign frankness he declared that it was not chivalrous considerations that restrained him. The desert was so big—not a seductive corner to be discovered anywhere.”

It was utterly impossible to tell, when Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice made such speeches, whether she was inwardly smiling, her gravity was always so birdlike. Nevertheless, Myra laughed, her first hearty laugh for many a day. When she sobered she made Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice promise that she would not introduce her to a dinner-party.

“I am not ready to meet people,” Myra said, decidedly.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice promised.



## CHAPTER XXI

THE next evening, when Myra put on a gown of the winter before, she realized how far she had traveled away from society. A year, and to the critical even a French importation was out of date. But its tint, a pale green overlaid with gold, was exquisite—as was the color in her cheeks. She was looking exceedingly well, perhaps because the prospect of throwing off anxiety, of relaxing for a short time amid surroundings to which she was accustomed—shaded lights, unobtrusive service, nonchalance, studied gaiety—filled her with a vague sense of pleasure. It was over eight months since she had attended a dinner-party.

Then Myra suddenly smiled at her reflection, the realization of her excitement touching her sense of humor. She was an office-woman who cooked her breakfasts over an alcohol-stove, and was going in an out-of-date gown to dine with an old lady who was so sorry for her that she had offered to make her a loan. More than that, she was an "anomaly." . . . Nevertheless her pleasure persisted, for she had been somewhat buffeted in Hosbrock's office, and had been desperately lonely in that little triangular room with the death's-head gaiety of Broadway nightly grinning in at her.

And cabs were not for her. With her skirts pinned up under her long cloak, Myra walked to Fifth Avenue and intrusted herself to the omnibus. Being used to the speed of limousines, she was late for dinner.

The rich appointments of Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's

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white-and-gold bedroom seemed very natural, quite a part of life, as did the attentions of the French maid.

"Am I very late, Clarisse?" she asked, as the girl in secret surprise unpinned her skirts and took away her long street coat. She knew Mrs. St. Claire; she had accompanied Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice to Woodmansie Place.

"*Un peu*, madame—the gentlemen have both come."

Myra turned on her abruptly. "What gentlemen?"

"I do not know them, madame," the girl said, surprised at Myra's manner.

Myra had flushed. Then she chilled, for she was deeply annoyed. She shrank from meeting strangers, and men in particular. Why had Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice gone so directly contrary to her request? If it was a bit of mischief, it was in bad taste.

Myra was still pale when she came into the drawing-room. She did not glance at the two black-coated figures that rose at her entrance. One of Myra's social assets was the cool indifference that on her entrance into a drawing-room saw only her hostess until greetings were exchanged. It invariably fixed every eye in the room upon her. Both men stood expectant now.

"Late, yes, my dear," Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice said, carelessly. "But we are such an informal party I forgive you. I felt it best to save you the ennui of an evening tête-à-tête with an old lady. I do not need to present these gentlemen—"

Myra turned then, swiftly, and the color flew into her cheeks. It was Janniss who took her hand first; Alyth awaited his turn, studying her flushed face in his unobtrusive way.

"Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice seems to have sprung a surprise," he said, when Myra turned to him.

"A very delightful one," Myra returned, brightly. She touched Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's arm, a gesture graceful in its suggestion of relief and pleasure. "How is it this

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little person always selects the people one wishes to see? A bit of mind-reading?"

"A wish that seems to have lain dormant," Janniss retorted in frank reproach. "I have not been in China. It seems I have been little more than a stone's-throw distant from you for two months."

Alyth, with his gift for silence, said nothing, and Myra knew instantly that Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had outlined the situation to the two. It was as well so. Alyth would understand without being told, but Janniss would not.

"Yes," she said, her look equally clear for both men, "I came in October. I am learning to be a business woman, and have been so desperately anxious to make good, and so fearful of failure, that I hesitated to burden my friends with my struggle. I have felt a little as you feel when you are painting a portrait, Mr. Janniss. You hide the thing from even the most friendly eye until it is an accomplishment; then the whole world may come and look at it."

Perhaps purposely Alyth led off from the personal. "Gerard works differently. He sets a half-finished portrait where his washer-woman or the janitor or any other chance person may stumble upon it, and then collects their involuntary comments. He tells me that there is a deal of help to be gleaned from their remarks."

"Gerard is never sure of himself," Janniss said, with professional scorn. "Even his portrait of a supposedly square-jawed broker hesitates in its frame."

"I shall endeavor to look immovable at my next sitting," Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice remarked, demurely. "He is painting me."

Both Myra and Alyth laughed, while Janniss, much to his own annoyance, flushed warmly. The ease with which he changed color always irritated him—as did the gold in his hair; infantile attributes both, he considered. He was not himself, anyway; it was difficult for him to con-



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ceal the excitement he was feeling; he had not done a stroke of work all day. His desire to atone had a boyish genuineness about it that made it charming.

"A little, bright-plumaged bird is rarely very still; perhaps Gerard's brush is the very one to do you justice. His 'Sixteen' is a really beautiful thing, and because of that very hesitant quality. When it comes to women, confound it! I am always painting *flesh*. I'm as jealous as the Emerald Isles of Gerard's elusive touch."

Though not as tall a man as Alyth, Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's elaborately dressed white head was on a level with his breast only, and as he looked down into her little pink, mischievous face he appeared very much the penitent son. It was the appeal he always made to Myra, and Alyth, standing by, watched the expression that crossed Myra's face—a look wonderfully sweet and tender. It struck Alyth that the man was lovable, and in need of just such qualities in a woman as Myra possessed.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's sparkling glances covered an acute observation of each of her guests. She was enjoying herself immensely. She had drawn certain inferences from the way in which both men had received her telephone invitation to meet Myra St. Claire: Janniss had accepted after a perceptible pause, and in a voice that had altered; Alyth had been quick and brief, almost curt. And she was further entertained when on their arrival she had explained the situation.

"I know I shall be telling you news," she had announced. "You don't know, of course, that Myra St. Claire has left her husband. It is not even an open secret yet, so you will please regard what I have told you as a confidence. She has been in New York for two months."

Alyth's face had grown slightly more set; Karl Janniss had flushed, and then gradually lost color.

"I didn't know," he said in a subdued way.

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After a pause Alyth had asked, "Is Mrs. Milenberg with her?"

"No, she is quite by herself and working, getting instruction in some firm, I believe; fitting herself to do interior decoration. Oddly enough, she is staying at the Hotel Cyril. It appears to be an inconspicuous enough place, and full of people doing something or other; but I proceeded to be shocked when I found her there—it's rather a contrast to Woodmansie Place, you know. Her reasons won me over, however. She means that her father shall give her his support, and he is not likely to relish the Hotel Cyril. Then she declares she enjoys getting that 'three-quarter' view of life, as she expresses it. Of course Myra would be safe anywhere; she has perfected the art of inaccessibility. And she has a really charming little apartment, homelike as Myra will always make any place in which she is given a free hand. . . . However, I mean to have her out here somewhere near me before long. I am very fond of Myra St. Claire. I should like to see her affairs adjusted, as they will be, of course, in time, and her future settled. Myra is a woman pre-eminently fitted for home-making. The man who finally wins her will be fortunate."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice felt that she had put the thing rather neatly, so much so that both men appeared to be speechless. Just like men! Any woman, no matter how much in love she was, would have found *something* to say. It was a little awkward in a way. Alyth, of course, knew what Janniss's blank look and darkened eyes meant, and possibly Janniss guessed Alyth's secret. It was a most entertaining situation, and would be more so when Myra arrived.

But Myra, when she came in, touched something more than the incessant craving for some satisfaction denied her that drove Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice about the world; that made her investigate all sorts of things; that tempted

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her to play with situations and with people. The girl was sweet; she delighted her. She had entered, white and cold, as graceful and withdrawn as Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had ever seen her, but at the breaking of surprise had turned as pink as a child. There was something relieved and joyous in her expression that remained with her throughout dinner.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had suspected that beneath the coldly graceful and tactful hostess of Woodmansie Place, and the earnest woman with whom she had talked the evening before, there was the alluring woman. She saw her revealed now. There was a little of the uncaged bird about Myra that evening that was irresistible—a thousand naturalnesses that were charming because so unconsciously alluring. She was alluring to the point of being compelling, and Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice understood the reason: two years of unhappy marriage, followed by six months of illness, and the little hotel room to give the entire experience poignancy. A reaction had set in, touched off by a subconscious realization of masculine demand that to Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's acute sense was apparent enough. The eternal, unalterable, world-populating *fact*—man's and woman's need of each other.

And how beautiful she was! Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had never seen her so beautiful. Janniss gazed at her with more than an artist's delight. Alyth turned on her his vivid glance, frequently a smiling one, and a smile was a rare thing with him. Of the two she judged him to be the more profoundly moved.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice was too much interested in the three people she had brought together to feel any jealousy of the woman who was swaying two men by the sheer charm of her personality. Myra had always been able to talk to clever men, though she was neither witty nor erudite. It was simply that everything she said was clothed in an air of freshness, a certain pleasing originality,



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the examination of every subject from a slightly different angle from the ordinary, that always won her interested attention.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice felt a mischievous satisfaction at the forces she had set going. There was but one woman, and here were two men, utterly different in most respects, but both of the not-to-be-denied sort. Janniss she liked thoroughly; he had passed unscathed through what must have been a tempting situation, hours of Adele Courland's society. It was true that Adele was under St. Claire's spell, and Janniss was certainly acute enough to have seen it, but Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice knew that Adele's infatuation for St. Claire inclined her the more to work mischief upon every man who approached her, a sort of determined retaliation upon the whole sex, a utilization of her own restlessness that worked havoc. It was the more astonishing that Janniss had escaped, as Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice felt very certain that he could be intensely emotional. He had great talent, and was already successful; there was much to be said for him.

But it was Alyth upon whom Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had serious intentions. She looked frequently from his dark face to Myra's warm yet delicate beauty. At Woodmansk Place Alyth had impressed her. She judged him strong-willed, self-restrained, and critical, a man of few loves, but those strong ones. He had power. He carried about with him an atmosphere of unswerving determination, of reliability. He would be capable of coping with either St. Claire or Milenberg. At Woodmansk Place she had felt certain that he was deeply interested in Myra; that he was there solely to see her. He was a man who, if he wanted a woman, would have her; wait patiently for her if need be. He had more stability than Janniss.

So, following out a well-defined plan, Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, after coffee and cigarettes, set going the great sex-attractor of the season. While the two men sat with

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eyes on Myra, she started the victrola on a muscle-twitching trot. Alyth's head lifted, a quick movement, then a pause, but Janniss was on his feet instantly and bent over Myra. The first note had caught him up bodily.

"Please," he said.

She looked up at him, a little startled, yet laughing. "I have not danced for eight months—and this thing—"

"We danced to it last spring. I taught you it. And this year you have heard it sung and whistled and barreled all over the place."

"Yes, you set all Woodmansie Place 'trotting.' I have the rhythm in my head still, but I am afraid my feet have lost the trick."

"Let us see," he begged.

Myra rose a little reluctantly, and Janniss took her in his arms. For the first few rounds of the spacious drawing-room she moved uncertainly, then she slipped into the swing of it, her innate sense of rhythm captured. Janniss was a masterful dancer, and Myra possessed almost perfect pliancy. They teetered, sidled, and as Myra relaxed into greater freedom they whirled round and round, clasped close, she at least swept into the sheer delight of motion, an ebullition of the high spirits that possessed her. They danced twice, then a third time, a gliding step that showed their mutual youth and grace.

Alyth had helped the butler to draw aside the chairs and rugs. Then he stood watching in so expressionless a way that Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice smiled a little to herself. He did not dance, probably—he was not the dancing sort—and Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice guessed that at that moment he was feeling no love for Karl Janniss. Her spirit of mischief was satisfied. She lifted the needle from the victrola's circling disk and called, "Fini!"

It was before Alyth the two stopped, and into his face Myra looked with eyes alight and lips parted, the breath-

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less look of a girl surprised at being swept into hilarity. Janniss was flushed to crimson, and a little husky.

"One more!" he begged.

But Myra refused. She must be going soon, and so far she had had no chance to talk alone with Alyth, which was the thing she wanted. She stood beside him while the drawing-room was righted, and Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice decided that it was time now to favor Alyth, so she led Janniss into the library to see a painting. Myra asked then at once the question she had wanted to ask all evening:

"You know a good deal of father's movements. Do you know when he will be here?"

Alyth hesitated. "Yes; I saw him to-day."

Myra was startled. Her eyes widened and dilated. One word from her father and Hosbrock would dispense with her services. . . . Still, it would not be like her father to take such a step until he had given her the benefit of the threat. Myra was back again with her anxieties.

"I suppose he will come to see me to-morrow?" she said, soberly. "Did he speak of me? . . . But, no, that would not be like him."

"No, he did not mention you. He is not looking well; his illness has told on him, so possibly it will have softened him a bit," Alyth said, reassuringly.

Her look of anxiety had aged her five years. She was no longer the bright girl who had laughed with Janniss. Her expression changed now to one of complete surprise. "Father ill!"

"You didn't know it, then? . . . One of the Huntington men who was on here from San Francisco told me. Your father had an attack of appendicitis while out there; not an operation—the doctors fixed him up without that, I believe; but he had a severe time of it, and it has told on him."

"I cannot imagine father ill," Myra said, wonderingly. "I know he has not told mother. . . . How like him!"



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"I've brought you ill news and anxiety. I have wiped the brightness out of your face; I was afraid I should. You have looked happier this evening than I have ever seen you."

"I am glad to know beforehand about father. . . . It has been a tremendous relief to throw the whole thing off for one evening."

"It has been hard, then—these two months?"

"Yes, it has been hard. I have been afraid sometimes that I would grow hard because of it. . . . I think, though, that I have simply learned a good deal. I try to think of it in that way."

Alyth recollected vividly the first words he had ever heard her speak, her remarks anent the patchwork quilt. He had had many thoughts of her that evening, some of them turbulent enough; he was still tense from the sight of her bright head against Janniss's shoulder. He went on steadily:

"Just what is it you are doing?"

Myra told him.

"Anton Hosbrock—" Alyth's brows contracted. He felt the same savage irritation that Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's mischievous trick of the dance had caused. His eyes dropped for a moment to Myra's throat and bosom, the involuntary jealous appreciation of what would be her attraction to a man like Hosbrock. Alyth had much of the modern spirit—at any rate he possessed it in theory—the willingness to give woman an equal opportunity, and the belief that she would be competent to hold her own; but the thought of Myra as employed by an Anton Hosbrock aroused in him an instant hot disapproval. And it was not in his power to take her away from it all. In time Janniss might.

Myra noticed his expression. "You know Mr. Hosbrock, then?"

"Yes. . . . He was architect of that enormity in Manor Park that I call home."

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It was the same note of bitter dissatisfaction Myra had more than once before heard from him. It seemed to her that the fold between his eyes was deeper than usual, the lines about his mouth harder. Evidently things were not going well with him. She was intensely sorry for him. For a moment she saw Caroline Alyth as she had looked when she had cuffed her little son. No wonder any reminder of his home exasperated him. But he loved his children.

"How are the boys?" she asked, her look as sweet as the one she had given Janniss earlier in the evening.

"My boys? . . . Why—I have at last gotten my way, and Jack is at boarding-school. The experience is doing him good. Dick, my companion these days, is building irrigation ditches across my bedroom floor. He almost brought down the drawing-room ceiling the other day when he attached rubber tubing to the bath-room tap and flooded his construction. My room is a network of wires and erections and constructions. I have to move about the place gingerly, but what of that? I am bound the boy shall have one spot where he may do as he pleases. Fortunately Caroline is so engrossed in investing her fortune that she has relaxed a little her hold on the boys. A hundred thousand dollars is something to be fondled tenderly." It was a relief to talk at some length. His voice lost its harshness in talking of Dick, and when he spoke of his wife his comments were more humorous than scornful.

It seemed natural to be talking again to Alyth in this intimate way, and, as had always been the case, she talked while weighted with anxiety—or uncertainty. Their acquaintance had from the beginning been on that footing. Myra was worried now about her father's impending visit. She found it hard not to be distraught; the spell that had held her throughout the evening was broken. She was ready to go back to her little room.

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There was something more she wanted to say, however, and she hastened to say it, for Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice and Janniss were returning: "A dozen times I have been on the point of letting you know I was in New York, and then my pride got in the way. I wanted to be able to say: 'See how well I am succeeding—and all through my own efforts!' I hope you won't bear me a grudge for it, but will come to see me? . . . The Hotel Cyril—unless my father ejects me." There was anxiety as well as a smile in her eyes.

Alyth looked down at her. Come to see her! It had been one of the questions he had been turning over and over in his mind ever since he had received Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's telephone message. How far dared he let himself go? But there was only one answer to be made to Myra: "Thank you—I shall certainly come."

Janniss, who had been secretly chafing at his detention in the next room, came directly to Myra, and Alyth stood aside then, allowing him to monopolize her. Janniss had the request to make that had been burning his tongue all evening.

"You wouldn't let me paint you at Woodmansie Place. Won't you be kinder now?" he asked. The wish to paint her had been a thing that had lived with Janniss ever since his first sight of her. She had always delighted the artist in him quite as much as she had pleased the man. The determination to paint her had been part of his infatuation.

"How can I be?" Myra protested. "I am busy all day." She smiled at his look of intense disappointment. "You don't realize yet that I am working eight hours a day."

"I had forgotten; but there is Sunday," he pleaded.

"My one day of rest!"

Janniss bore the refusal as best he could; there was the future in which he could get his way. "But I may come to see you?" he asked.



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"Yes, some evening," Myra said, cordially. Her evenings had been desolate enough.

Myra was ready to go, and it was Janniss who asked to take her down to the limousine Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had insisted upon ordering. Alyth kept his distance. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice wondered what had passed between the two while she and Janniss were absent. She had gathered that it was a serious conversation. Myra's face had lost its brightness. She did not know what to make of Alyth's expression; there was neither joy nor excitement in it, only a certain fixidity. When Myra announced her readiness to go Alyth took his departure, somewhat hastily, Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice thought. There was already something between these two people.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice was well satisfied with the evening, and ready to reconnoiter a little, so she accompanied Myra into the bedroom. While Clarisse waited upon her guest her tongue ran on:

"That black-a-browed friend of yours, *ma chère*, that Alyth man, tell me about him? It seems incredible, but I have only seen him once before—at Woodmansie Place."

"He is a mining expert—one of the best in the country," Myra answered, a little absently. She was wondering if possibly her father had been that night to see her. It would not improve his temper to find her out.

"*Mon Dieu!*" Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice exclaimed. "I am well aware of that! It is the first thing one learns about the man! He was head-lined a dozen times in the papers last winter—some wonderful doing or other in South America. He is successful, and very sure of himself, and a self-made individual, and all that—one learns it simply by looking at him. I telephoned him at his office. Where does he live? What is his fortune, and who are his friends, and is he engaged, semi-attached, or care-free?"

"I know very little about him socially," Myra an-

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swered. "Your New York friends can tell you more than I. I fancy he cares very little for society. He is married and lives in some suburb—Manor Park, I believe."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice stood in petrified silence. If Myra had not been busied with Clarisse her little friend's face would have startled her. When Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice finally searched for her voice it was robbed of expression.

"Married," she said, softly. "The dear Lord! . . . Why, I have never known a more unmarried man—in effect." Then she was visited by a flash of intuition. "In the suburbs. . . . Don't tell me now that he is a father—"

"Yes. Why are you so surprised?" Myra asked. "He has two little boys."

"And a charming wife?" Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice persisted.

"No," Myra said, gravely. "She grew up in a little rolling-mill town. . . . I am afraid she has never grown much beyond it. I am afraid he is no happier in his home than I was at Woodmansie Place."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice said no more. She was subdued and affectionate in her farewell. "Remember that I am ready to be your banker," she said, a little plaintively. "I am very certain I am not fit to be your councilor." When she had finally shut the door on her guests she came back absently to Clarisse, and, sitting down, studied the toe of her slipper. "I have put my foot in it," she said.

"*Qu'y a-t-il, madame?*"

"I have put my foot in it, Clarisse," Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice repeated, soberly, and quite forgetful of the French language.

Clarisse dropped on her knees to examine Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's small slippers, and then the floor. "But I find nothing, madame—the carpet—there is nothing there."

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Her mistress stared down at her for a moment, and then she laughed ruefully. "Never mind, Clarisse—you will not find it."

"‘It,’ madame—?"

"My good sense, girl—my moral sense, I should say. It is quite the thing to play with marriage these days, and to-night I have accomplished about as much mischief as is possible in one evening. The man is utterly in love—both are . . . and she is hovering—she does not know where."



## CHAPTER XXII

JANNISS watched the limousine that bore Myra mingle and then become indistinguishable from the other lights and shadows of the Drive. He stood for a time on the sidewalk, waiting for an omnibus. Then, with the desire for motion that excitement causes, he crossed to the park side of the Drive; he could walk until an omnibus picked him up. It was not too cold for walking.

Two blocks farther down he met Alyth. Alyth was not walking; he was standing firmly planted, arms crossed, looking down at the river. The water reflected the blue-black sky, its opaqueness as well as its gossamer shimmer of iridescence, the radiance cast by the huge glow-worm city upon the high strata of fog that hid the stars. In all the inky canopy there did not gleam a single star. The river twisted along stealthily, like some huge black serpent whose motion would be imperceptible but for the ripple of its iridescent skin. It was the strings of river lights that made the slow motion apparent.

"Hello, Alyth!" Janniss said. "Are you also waiting to be picked up by the omnibus?"

Alyth wheeled, his surprise evident. "You, Janniss? . . . No, farther down I meant to cross over to Central Park. I've not walked my three miles to-day."

"Let me walk with you, then—as long as you keep to the Drive."

"Certainly." Alyth was glad that Janniss did not propose to walk farther with him. He wanted to be

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alone. He was in no mood for conversation, and least of all with Janniss.

"You've been looking at the water," Janniss said, as they started off together. "It's dully luminous to-night, like the queer sky above us. It's a bit cery. I've seen the same effect before; but I have never tried to paint it."

Janniss wanted to talk, and if possible on the subject that engrossed him. When he met Alyth it suddenly occurred to him that Alyth might be helpful, he knew both Milenberg and St. Claire so well. Since their meeting at Woodmansie Place the spring before he and Alyth had seen something of each other, an acquaintance that had been mostly of Alyth's seeking. Janniss's studio was on Fifty-seventh Street, and when Alyth stayed the night in the city he usually stopped at the Great Northern, but a few doors away. He sometimes dropped into Janniss's studio in the late afternoon and smoked with him for an hour. Janniss had acquired a liking for the secretive, silent man whose passion for accomplishment equaled his own.

Alyth said nothing, and they walked in silence for a time. Janniss wanted to introduce his subject, and did so finally, very directly.

"Alyth, you know those two—Milenberg and St. Claire. What is going to be the outcome—with Mrs. St. Claire?"

"Am I a diviner?" Alyth hid his hot irritation under brevity.

But once started, Janniss was not to be checked. He was too tensely in earnest. "Will her father help her out, Alyth? . . . He will have to, surely. His hand will be forced sooner or later."

Alyth glanced sharply at the young man's clean-cut features that gleamed white in their setting of black coat and hat. "What do you mean?"

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"I mean that any man who sees much of Myra St. Claire will want her."

"I'd trust her under any such circumstances—she's an innately virtuous woman."

"It's my reading of her, too," Janniss returned with conviction. "Nevertheless, she's so completely feminine that some man will love her to distraction, and not rest till he gets her."

It was Alyth's own reading of Myra St. Claire. "He'll have his nerve about him; she's not free," Alyth retorted, thickly. He shoved down his coat collar, as if it was its touch against his lips that obstructed his speech.

"Every man has who ventures successfully. . . . What's the good of pretending that things are not as they are?" Janniss demanded. "You know as well as I that half the marriages after divorce are arranged before the law has had its say. And in this case you know the circumstances. There never was a more utter misalliance of natures than in that marriage."

"True enough; but even the adventurous must have something to go on. There are mighty few men who propose marriage—or the other thing—to a married woman without the aid of encouragement." Suspicion was rampant in Alyth; he was scorching with it. "What are *you* going on?" was what his question meant, and that Janniss was too engrossed to recognize.

"It's simply that Myra St. Claire feels free, and every man who comes near her will sense that. He doesn't need any other encouragement. I saw her at Woodmansie Place—and so did you—and you saw how it was to-night. She has never said an intimate word to me, but at Woodmansie Place it was plain enough she felt tied, and hated it. Now she has shaken the whole thing off. She looks at it this way: she and St. Claire are not one—they couldn't be made one by a thousand ceremonies—so their bond is a mere legal form that can be legally



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revoked. It has nothing to do with her freedom of thought or feeling. I haven't her word for it—all this is guesswork, but I'm sure I'm right."

It was Alyth's own conclusion, yet he maintained, "A man's guesswork about a woman is apt to be faulty."

"I'd wager my head I'm right! Myra St. Claire *feels free, and if a woman feels free she can be won*. She has simply returned to her maiden state—plus experience. . . . What makes all this prearrangement that goes on possible? Just that same feeling she has!"

The suspicion that had burnt Alyth had quieted. He drew a freer breath. "Yes, the psychology of the woman who separates from her husband has changed in the last few years—just as the reasons for separation have multiplied. And it has grown out of the discovery of a whole new set of needs in marriage."

"I was brought up in an old-fashioned family," Janniss continued, tensely, "but if winning the woman I wanted depended on new-fashioned methods, I'd stomach them. . . . I know one thing: before I'd let my work go to pieces because of love for a woman whose matrimonial knot could be untied, I would face a dozen Milenbergs."

He had unconsciously stated his case, and again Alyth studied the white blot that was his face. The guardianship of Myra's welfare that had gone hand in hand with Alyth's own increasing desire had taken the place of jealous suspicion. His art came first with Karl Janniss—did he also want to use Myra as a means to an end? He could easily have forced Janniss's confidence; but it was the last thing he wanted. As it was, it would be a questionable thing to meddle in the matter, but to betray a man's confidence was beyond Alyth. A confidence would effectually tie his hands.

"As long as we make marriage a mere vehicle—oiled by passion—in which to trundle along our ulterior mo-

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tives, I suppose we will have our present state of matrimonial chaos," he observed, cuttingly.

But Janniss was not seeing his need in that light. "There is certainly a deal about marriage as it is practised that's revolting," he agreed. "I've never wanted it—I've been afraid of it. But the Lord knows I need *something*—my work's going to pieces. I haven't painted a decent stroke in eleven months." His voice deepened into passion when he spoke of his work.

Alyth instantly made the calculation; eleven months ago they were both at Woodmansie Place. "Well, that's all well enough, a good reason for marrying—provided you make the reason plain to the woman you want to marry. A clear understanding beforehand—that's what women seem to be demanding now." Alyth carefully eliminated the appearance of sarcasm from the speech.

"It wouldn't be my only reason, by any means!" Janniss said, with a quick-drawn breath.

Alyth judged not from what he had observed.

They walked on in silence for a time; then Janniss referred to Milenberg again. "Alyth, you know the two pretty well. Is it St. Claire has a hold on Milenberg, or Milenberg on St. Claire?"

"I have no means of knowing."

"It was plain enough to me that that marriage cemented a bargain of some sort. Those two were as thick as thieves at Woodmansie Place."

"They are still. Milenberg is not one who will let a little domestic trifle such as his daughter's affair with St. Claire interfere with business."

"His daughter may assert herself, however. She seems to have gotten her way so far."

"That's possible. . . . But if I was the man who wanted Myra St. Claire I think I'd not be in too much haste. I'd be pretty sure of the genuineness of what I had to

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offer her, first of all. She has had one bitter lesson—she's going to be more clear-sighted a second time."

"And who but a cad would deceive her!" Janniss exclaimed, hotly. "It takes a St. Claire to do a thing like that."

"A man may easily deceive himself as to his motives, though."

They had come several blocks together, and Alyth paused. His endurance had been tested to the limit. The thing had followed on hours of prolonged tension; he was being asked to help another man to a woman who in his dreams he had called his, but to whom he had no right whatever, not even the possibility of a right, a little circumstance of which he had been poignantly conscious all evening. Myra might "feel free"; he certainly did not.

"I'm going across to the Park now," he said in a voice he compelled to casualness. "I'll come in to see you one of these afternoons, Janniss, if I may, so good night to you. . . . There's an omnibus bearing down on us, so you will be leaving me anyhow." And he swung off.

But as Alyth strode along he swore passionately: "*Damn* Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice! What a night's work!"



## CHAPTER XXIII

"H M!" Milenberg said, looking around him. "You've put up a good bluff, Myra—I'll say that for you. But aren't you about tired of it?"

He had come in with a casual greeting, as if he had parted from his daughter possibly an hour before. He dropped his overcoat on a chair, and, drawing another up to the little center-table, sat with his arm thrown across it. There was no appearance of anger about him, only a certain grimness, the air of a man who has big affairs on his hands and has paused for a moment to attend to a minor difficulty to which he meant to give short shrift. As Alyth had said, he did not look well. His color was dingy, the lines in his face more apparent, and he was decidedly thinner.

"The couch is more comfortable, father," Myra said. "Won't you sit there?" She was much relieved that he had not come in an angry mood. His determined air she did not dread so much; she had plenty of determination with which to meet it. And to see him looking ill was quite a new experience. There was solicitude in both her voice and her eyes.

He promptly resented it. "Why the couch?" he said, sharply. "You know I never loll about!"

"But you have been ill."

"Who told you?" he demanded. "There's been nothing in the papers."

Myra hesitated, fearing that she might bring his displeasure upon Alyth.

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He eyed her. "Hosbrock, of course. . . . Somebody brought the word on from San Francisco. But I'm on hand all right—I showed myself on Wall Street yesterday. The U. M. M. won't slump just yet."

"You have been seriously ill, then, father?"

"Yes," Milenberg confessed, grimly. "They wanted to operate, but I wouldn't have it—not now. It would have been nuts to some people to have me laid by the heels for a spell. . . . But mind, not a word about it to your mother! She doesn't know a thing about it. If she'd known she'd have come out to me, and I didn't want that. Your mother's a good soul—but—well, it wouldn't have done, that's all."

Myra understood; she knew who was her father's traveling companion.

Milenberg returned to the matter in hand. "I'm rushed to death. I haven't had a minute since I came in yesterday morning, or I'd have been around before to hear your account of yourself. Before we get down to business suppose you give it to me."

"Do I need to?" Myra inquired. "You have been informed."

He nodded. "Yes, I knew you were neighboring with the scarlet petticoats—that hotel just below there, where the nigger is shaking a rug out of the window, is a by-word. And the innocent-looking dwelling just opposite, whose front door never opens, is inlaid with mirrors from top to bottom."

"If you know of such places, why not I?" Myra returned, composedly. "If Irma and Ina knew a little more it would be as well for them—they would do some thinking before marrying."

"Oh, quit!" her father interrupted, brusquely. "The thing has always been, is, and always will be. What good does all this 'knowing' do you women? One-third of you are all curiosity on the entire subject of man and

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woman, another third a muddle of dissatisfaction that makes you uncomfortable to live with, but doesn't land you anywhere, and the smaller third—you're one of them—are a bunch of revolutionaries."

"Give us time, father; give us time."

"More years than I expect to live! . . . What I want to hear about is how you got into Hosbrock's? On your face, I'll be bound."

"Partly; but it is capability has kept me there."

"Well, I'll have to see Hosbrock, and before I do I want the straight of it."

Myra gave him a succinct account, much as he might have given it himself. Milenberg listened closely. His only changes of expression were when she told him of Hosbrock's advances to her; his brows came together then. When she gave him a copy of her letter to Hosbrock, together with Hosbrock's answer, he relaxed into a dry smile. He glanced at her letter a second time.

"A bit peurile that; but you've got fight in you, all right. I thought, of course, you'd told Hosbrock who you were when you went to him—it would have been a drawing-card."

Myra had hoped for that comment from him. She was thinking more of her father than of Hosbrock when she wrote the letter.

Then he thrust it aside. It had nothing to do with his affair. He had come for a purpose, and was pushed for time. He came straight to the point. "Well, you've had a bit of experience that won't hurt you," he said. "But I want you to get out of this now. Whether or not you go back to St. Claire eventually, I want you to go home. This sort of thing"—his glance swept the room—"is out of the question." Then observant of her steady look, he nodded. "It's *damned nonsense*, I tell you! . . . I've let you go on because I judged it would do you good to realize what you're up against. But I'm done now."



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His thin jaw had set, his eyes narrowing slightly, for Myra's steady look had not wavered. Antagonism always brought out a likeness in expression.

But she spoke smoothly enough. "And if I decline to go?"

"What good would that do you? I mean to fix Hosbrock—you won't go back *there*. Get any other place and I'll fix it the same way. If you attempt any such thing as tattling in Washington, I'll fix *that*, too. . . . I've got the cash behind me, Myra, and you have a little loose change. It's a fool trick trying to fight me."

"I don't want to fight you unless you force me to it," Myra said. "But after what you have said I feel that I am more than ever in the right. If it is men's 'cash' that coerces women, what women need is cash of their own, and that's what I mean to prepare myself to earn—'*cash*.'" She had risen and was standing, her hands at her sides, Milenberg's own attitude when facing a difficulty. "My life is not yours to command—or Justin's. If a man commands a woman now it is because she *allows* him to do it. If I went home I should be as I was when a girl, more or less helpless because you *pay* for me. I couldn't bring myself to it. I have longed for freedom; I've had a taste of it, and I like it. *You can't use the economic whip on me, father*. . . . And you shall not drive me out of employment, either. The right to work belongs to every individual. You'll not meddle with my right."

"I'll do what I think is for your good."

"I'm a woman grown; I am judge of what is for my good. It is just as much for my good to work as it is for Eustace to work, and that is a thing you have been trying to persuade him to do for years. Why, simply because I am a woman, should I be housed and clothed and fed by you?"

"Good Lord!" Milenberg exclaimed in sudden exas-

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peration. "I've got a half-dozen million and more. Why the devil should my daughters work? If you won't live with your husband, at least come home where you belong. I'm tired of your nonsense, and I mean to put an end to it!"

"And I mean to stay where I am," Myra asserted, clearly. "You have brought it down to a matter of 'cash.' Well, I can procure what cash I need."

"So Justin was right—there is a man in the background, after all." It was a sneer, though edged with anxiety.

Myra's lip curled. "It would have to be a man, wouldn't it, father, when it comes to a matter of 'cash'? Another conviction of yours: a woman won't help another woman—they are all born enemies of one another, therefore the more dependent on man. That has been and is still true in the main—unfortunately. But in my case it happens to be a woman, father. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice has offered to let me have what I need, so you are free to help me or not, as you like."

There was perfect silence while Milenberg measured her—her resolution and her capability. His judgment was unerring in some respects, and he was far too good a fighter to allow himself to become enraged when fairly beaten. He was reflecting quite coolly that in spite of her notions his daughter was "good goods"; Eustace was not, but Myra was, as he had expressed it to himself more than once, "on the square." Milenberg had the respect for square dealing usual to the man who has not always dealt squarely. . . . What was it Myra had told him at Woodmansie Place?—"Eustace has drawn one set of conclusions, I another." Eustace had certainly made plain what his set of conclusions were, and Myra was getting her way because of the conclusions she had drawn. . . . His children were giving him a deal of trouble. If he had it to do over again the last thing he'd do would

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be to marry—children were too great a responsibility. They had a way of looking you in the face with your own eyes—Myra looked a bit like him as she stood there—uncomfortably so. And Eustace. . . . A muscle in Milenberg's thin cheek twitched because of the tight set of his teeth.

He motioned Myra to her chair. "Sit down and tell me just what it is you want. . . . I can't have strangers seeing my children through. . . . Now what is it you want?"

Myra was glad enough to sit down; she had suddenly begun to shake from head to foot. She had won out, she knew that; but now she could scarcely keep from weeping from sheer nervousness. It had taken her the better part of the night and day to decide what to say to her father.

"I—want you to—to realize first of all that I will never go back to Justin."

"I knew that before I came," Milenberg said, shortly. "Your letter to your mother convinced me of that. . . . What next?"

"That I'm in earnest when I say I'd rather live this way—in this little room always—than be dependent on you or any one else."

"I'll grant it, though you're the first woman that's convinced me that such talk's more than skin-deep. I've known too many women who were looking for food and clothes—both in marriage and out of it. . . . Go ahead!"

"I want you to understand what I mean when I say that I don't want your money, any part of it. I have always been afraid of it—it has done no good to any of us. But I do feel that because you brought me into the world you owe me something. I simply want enough to educate me to support myself."

"And last, but not least, you want a divorce," Milen-



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berg concluded. "That makes the list of 'wants' complete, doesn't it?"

"I can work better if I am free. I am an anomaly as it is."

"Of course. But that is where the pinch will come." He sat as he had sat since he came in, his gaze on hers, and Myra knew from his slightly filmed eyes that he was thinking intently. "I'll tell you what I'll do," he said, finally. "I'll give you an income—put a sum in bank for you to draw on. Educate yourself for anything you like, only choose something that has a future to it. As you've made up your mind to be a free-lance, be successful at it. . . . Then get yourself an apartment where you can live as you've been used to living. Get some servants, and pick up your friends. But, Myra," and he bent to her now, both his look and his voice emphatic, "I can't get you your divorce! *It's not in my hands*, understand? Justin is the controlling force there. You have thrown the legal right to him, and you'll have to abide largely by his will in the matter. I don't mind telling you that I sounded him long ago—it's not like me to be caught napping—and he is dead set against it. He'll fight—he'll take care you get no evidence. It may be that your marriage is a shield to keep off some woman who has a claim on him; it may be that he considers it a hold on me; it may be a half-dozen reasons—it's not easy to disentangle Justin's reasons—but *this I know*: it will take time, and a long time, to bring Justin to it. That's one reason I tried to persuade you to lie quietly on the bed you have made."

"On the bed that was made for me," Myra said. "It was money that married me to Justin, and he means it shall be money that shall separate me from him."

Milenberg's lips twitched in a smile he could not completely control. She was clever, this daughter of his!

"Possibly," he returned, his voice at its driest; "but

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I'm not ready to square accounts with Justin yet—I can't square accounts with him yet. I have no intention of being hipped by Justin St. Claire. When the right time comes we shall see. What I want you to realize is that it may be a long time coming." He rose with the air of the man who has said all that need be said.

Myra did not retort that her marriage had been a bargain, so it might be expected that her divorce would also be. Let them chaffer over setting the legal seal to a separation that was an accomplished fact—take their time over it. She felt free. Freedom was largely a matter of belief.

She who hated to fight had fought. She felt utterly exhausted, and received her father's parting injunctions in silence.

"Get out of this at once," he said. "Better go out to Riverside Drive if Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice is friendly to you. If she'll chaperon you, so much the better—it 'll give Justin that much less of a case against you, and it 'll make it easier for you while you're neither fish, flesh, feather, nor bone."

He was getting into his overcoat with some difficulty, and Myra, observing it, moved to help him.

"Let be!" he said, sharply. "I can manage by myself! It's just that my shoulders are stiff coming back into this climate. If you want to do something, telephone down and make sure my limousine's down there. It's the first time in my life I've ridden round with rugs and foot-warmer. I'll be damned if I'll keep it up! I'd rather go under the sod than dodder about like some I know!"

Myra realized that his sharpness was because of some secret hurt. As he jerked his gloves on he said, abruptly:

"I've been having the devil's own time with Eustace. He put my name to paper while I was helpless out there."

"Father!"

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"Yep," Milenberg said through his teeth. "A fairish sum, too."

"And mother?" Myra asked, quickly.

"She knows nothing about it, and I mean she never shall. He's had such a fright he'll be on his good behavior for a while. . . . Eustace wants a fixed income, and perhaps he'll get it—he needs to be pensioned—he's so dilapidated; you're bound to try out life in your own fashion, and I suppose will come a cropper, and now Irma wants to marry an Italian who has followed her over here, a man twice her age who has gone the pace and has a little pile of debts to show for it. He has a good title—I've made sure of that—but that's all he offers. What Irma wants is to shake her family altogether." He snarled a little. "A comforting lot, my children!"

Myra had nothing to say; the truth would certainly not be comforting. His children were the logical products of the home in which they had been reared. Why should James Milenberg's son shrink particularly from putting his father's name to paper? He was fourteen when his father's name had figured in head-lines in every newspaper in the country—old enough to draw his own conclusions.

"I'm as good at spending money as the governor is at making it," Eustace had once told Myra, airily. "What is the old gentleman kicking about? He's pinched every pocket he could. I'm just handing it out again—putting it into circulation."

Poor Eustace! And little Irma wanted passionately to get away entirely from her environment; as she saw it marriage was the only way out.

But her father's hard, lined face with its look of illness and disgust also appealed to Myra. "I am very sorry about Eustace, and I am sorry if I have caused you anxiety, father," she said, gently. "I haven't wanted to make trouble."



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"You're the least of my troubles," Milenberg returned, irritably. He gave her his cutting glance. "Sure you've been straight with me in one respect—that you've got no inkling around which corner the next man is waiting for you?"

Myra's tired eyes widened. "I have assured you of that more than once. The thought of marriage frightens me. If marriage has to be as it is with most people, I don't want it!"

Milenberg laughed shortly. "I wonder how long you can live without it! . . . Well, as things are, if ever you suspect which corner, take the opposite turning. Better shy from that complication," he advised, as he went out.

## CHAPTER XXIV

MYRA absolutely refused to be burdened with an establishment. "Why should I be harassed by ten rooms and the oversight of servants? I want just space enough to live comfortably in and one maid," Myra had argued. "These huge establishments people crave are nothing but advertisements. They make troubled women like my mother, or such as I appeared to be at Woodmansie Place, cool and calculating, determinedly advertising a prosperity we did not possess. I have no patience with our practice of advertising both what we have and what we have not, but wish the world to think we have."

"Oh, very well," Milenberg said, finally. "There's no reason my daughter should not live just as well as Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice; but have your own way. I suppose you will end by being a rampant socialist." Then, with the keenness that never let slip an interesting admission, he questioned: "I suppose Justin was putting a bold front on at Woodmansie Place? I've never been able to determine just what Justin's assets are. I judged him worth taking at face value."

Myra was instantly non-committal. "Justin never made a confidante of me."

Milenberg said no more; he only smiled a little in his dry way.

So Myra was allowed to settle herself in a moderate-sized apartment in one of the less-imposing structures on Riverside Drive, with but one servant, no motor, and an absence of ostentation generally.

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Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice promptly came to inspect Myra's choice. Conjointly with her charitable interests, her avowedly feminist bias, and her substratum of conservatism, Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice was innately a social *intrigante*. It was plain to Myra that she had social designs upon her. The little lady's restless spirit was for ever looking about for an interest, and Myra chanced to interest her. Myra thoroughly liked her, though she did not take her very seriously, the little lady's remarks on love and marriage most lightly of all.

She evidently expected to find her protégée in a more elaborate setting. "My dear—what a *little* nest!" she said, with a note of doubt.

Myra repeated what she had said to her father.

"*Sans doute!*" She lifted her lorgnette for a more deliberate survey, then nodded her plumes decidedly. "It is all quite true. We Americans are disgusting. We are a walking advertisement. Still, I have friends, some wealthy, and some with nothing whatever, who think just as you do. Your ideas are really quite popular, only so seldom put into practice. . . . And one is so liable to be disillusioned by the loudest advocates of simplicity. There was a most interesting man who used to call upon me last winter. He was a tremendous advocate of the simple life. He disclosed to me how he laundered his own linen. His collar was given its circular effect by being wrapped about a large granite-ware cup, and ironed by his own hands—the same cup in which he prepared his breakfast eggs. He lived in one room in a model tenement somewhere near the East River. He had a great contempt for wealth. The American 'automobile rush' was hated by him." Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice sighed. "However, this summer he married, and to my amazement I find that he is now enjoying an ornate apartment on Park Avenue. He wears yellow gloves and spats, and daily rides in a magnificent car. His wife is a florid



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person much older than himself, whose first husband made money in chocolate creams."

Myra laughed. "I shall not backslide."

"No—you are pre-eminently fitted for an artist's wife. You would make an adorable wife for a successful artist." Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice threw off the suggestion casually, commenting in the same breath: "The more I look about me the better I like your nest, my dear. That bay of the window with its view of the river! A little room in itself—just space for a divan and pillows, and your tea-table. And this drawing-room, with a fireplace that actually burns!" She waxed enthusiastic. "When you have given this your atmosphere of warmth and *tendresse*! I am really charmed. You will be an interesting person—young and beautiful, and with your ideals!"

How much of Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's chatter was earnest, and how much a mischievous testing of her, Myra could not tell. Still, she had no intention of living her life according to the little lady's direction, any more than by her father's ruling. The future was certain to have its embarrassments, so Myra gave warning promptly:

"You forget that I shall have very little time in which to be 'an interesting person.' There are three things I mean to avoid in this new life I am making for myself: extravagance, the demands of society, and sex play. Love may come to me some time in the long future, but I don't want to think of it. Marriage frightens me. I want to stand free of it all. A woman should be able to do so."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice made no comment. She asked, instead: "Tell me about your work. Do you still go on with the sympathy-craving person of whom you told me?"

"No, I have apprenticed myself to a woman who does some of the most artistic interior decoration in the city—Miss Wentworth. For a year I give my services in exchange for practical training. What I want is a partnership—finally."

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"You will succeed. I predict it. But commensurate with your success will be your need for—companionship. . . . How does your father say Justin is disposed?"

"He will not free me."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice nodded. "That was the impression I received from Justin himself," she said, gravely. "I did not mean to tell you, but perhaps it is as well I should—I received a visit from Justin yesterday. I spoke very plainly to him, but he was not to be moved. Still, it is Justin's rule in life to say the thing he does not think, so I hoped for a different verdict from your father."

Myra had flushed painfully. "Justin will not come here?"

"No, no, he is too wise for that. He will not disturb you. He says he is here for two days only, and on business. It is our servants, however, who know the innermost workings of our being. Clarisse exchanges the secrets of my heart with Adele's tirewoman. Justin, it seems, has visited Adele."

Myra was silent.

"Justin has a fever of some sort, my dear. What is it makes Justin hectic—money?" Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice asked, abruptly.

Myra's answer was the same as to her father. "I never had Justin's confidence." She had the feeling of sickness that any reminder of St. Claire occasioned. St. Claire hectic! The recollections Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's remark stirred made her shrink.

Her visitor, noting her expression, immediately plunged into talk of furniture, curtains, and color schemes. "It is most fortunate you have been given a free hand in decoration," she declared. "Your good taste will make this beautiful." After putting her car, and her servants, and anything she possessed at Myra's disposal, she took her departure. She had wanted extremely to ask if Myra had seen Alyth again, for she was still feeling guilty.

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Janniss she knew was a frequent visitor. Well, that was a much safer affair—a very good thing it might prove in the end. She would take Myra out in society, help her to meet other men, divert her; it was her duty after having worked greater mischief than she had intended.

“With my mind’s eye I see you in a charming little home,” she said in farewell. “Remember, you are to come to me next Sunday afternoon. I have asked people to meet you.”

Myra sighed as she went back to her house-settling. The loneliness of the last two months had certainly been offset by compensations.

In the following weeks Myra met many of Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice’s friends. The little lady had a somewhat heterogeneous acquaintance that she handled with consummate skill. Educators, social workers, suffragists, feminists, and advocates of ideas in general; artists, authors, journalists came to her house; but always in carefully assorted groups. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had a natural aptitude for selection that saved her from being overrun. She made little effort to corral celebrities, the result being that she numbered a few among her friends.

She was also connected with quite a different set of people, the kind among whom she had been reared, ultra-conventionalists, thoroughly intrenched behind family barriers. With their younger, restless, audacious generation she was quite at home. She was cognizant of their escapades and their scandals; she gave them shrewd as well as friendly advice.

“They make me yawn so delightfully, the old people,” she declared to Myra, “and the younger set interest me. They are *to-day*—why shut one’s eyes to the fact? They are principally occupied in making up to money—much as Justin has done.”

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice was kin to several “good old” New York families. Her little group of “family retain-



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ers," as she designated them, looked with forbearance upon her mixed acquaintance.

"I manage to keep them separate, as a general thing, choosing carefully the spice I inject into the family gatherings, so all goes well," she explained to Myra. "They have at last gotten over objecting to Riverside Drive. When I settled in New York I was unable to see why I should spend my mornings gazing at a brown-stone front on West Eleventh when I could have the North River to look out upon! . . . I am glad you are like-minded, my dear."

Myra met Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's friends, was illusive with the women, and charmingly inaccessible to the men. "Work" was a good excuse for not accepting many invitations. There were few who found their way into her little apartment, for Myra foresaw what some of her difficulties would be. Even in the first weeks she sensed the interested curiosity of those she met.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had explained after her fashion: "A case of utter incompatibility. There are no children, so of course things will settle themselves quite naturally—we are becoming so sensible. . . . She is the daughter of James Milenberg, you know, the Chicago millionaire. Of course she has any amount of money behind her, but she has the same idea as the Emperor of Germany—that every member of his family should learn a trade. An interesting woman, and so clever."

In a way Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's explanations were helpful. On the other hand, Myra was subjected to much curious inspection, some of it impertinent and harassing. Women in the main were skeptical. Mrs. St. Claire was certainly either very peculiar or out "man-hunting." Why wasn't she in her father's house? They did not attach much weight to her training for a profession. The daughter of a multi-millionaire! Just fadding! She was too good-looking for her own welfare. There was a

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man in the case, of course, and a woman as well, probably—the usual quadrilateral. They smiled upon Myra, however, and asked her to their entertainments. If she had money at her disposal she might be of value. When they saw how simply she lived they were surprised and hesitant. Still, they could drop her easily enough if it wasn't all right.

Men also had their skeptical comments to make, and quite irrespective of the fact that they all found Myra charming. They attempted to flirt with her just so much the more baldly because of her anomalous position. Myra had set her face against sex play. She found that it was universal—far more so even than at Woodmansie Place. There were those who, when well out of their wives' hearing, expressed a pointed interest in the discovery that she "lived alone." Then there were the undisguised fortune-hunters. One foreigner who was that winter seeing much of New York society, on meeting Myra promptly inquired, "Are you, then, divorced?" and, quite undaunted by her frigid glance, remarked, "Ah, the American law is so merciful. I hope I have the pleasure to call?" In spite of Myra's reply he wrote her a dozen impassioned letters before dropping into silence.

Myra also had a disagreeable experience with Frank A. Hipbard, one of St. Claire's friends, one of the financiers she had steadily smiled upon during that week of misery she would never forget, when St. Claire was using her to further his schemes. She met Hipbard at a dance at Mrs. Carson Ostrand's, to which Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice took her, escorted by Janniss. Mrs. Carson Ostrand belonged to the younger generation of the "family retainers," a willowy, slumbrous-eyed woman whose sinuosity and low laugh were only vaguely familiar to Myra until Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice explained: "Pauline Ostrand used to wriggle and cough like Bernhardt, and this year it is our dear Adele she is patterning herself after. Pauline

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has taken up Adele, for just what purpose I can't determine, unless it is simply to copy her."

At Mrs. Carson Ostrand's Myra saw Adele Courland for the first time since coming to New York. Adele's great, brilliant eyes fairly blazed with hate when she saw Myra, then smoldered into satisfaction when she saw that Janniss was her escort, a look that dulled into almost animal fear on meeting Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's eye. Compelled by Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's presence, she shook hands with Myra, and Myra submitted to the ceremony with perfect composure.

It was just at this juncture that Hipbard presented himself, a thick-set man, immaculately groomed, bald, and with eyes too small for his otherwise pronounced features. Myra remembered that he was a bachelor, and about to build a wonderful place somewhere near New York. Myra thought it best to dance with him when he asked her, and thoroughly disliked the close clasp to which he subjected her.

"So St. Claire is in New York?" he asked, at once. "I saw him in Washington only a few days ago."

As Myra knew well, with his kind it was "business first," women next. He was instantly curious to know what St. Claire was doing in town; it was hardly possible that he knew of their separation.

"No, he is not here. I am with Mr. St. Claire's cousin to-night, Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice."

Evidently he did not know Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice. "Oh, are you? You're going to let me see something of you while you are here. St. Claire 'll not object. He and I are pretty close pals these days. We must have lunch together some time, you and I, and a good talk."

Myra knew that it must be his money that had brought him into this house, he was so evidently of common origin. He was ordinary, but very shrewd. He had known perfectly well what had been her use during that



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week, and his deduction was natural: if she lent herself to such manœuvres as St. Claire's she certainly would not be averse to a flirtation during her husband's absence. She might even be capable of going the lengths; at any rate, he was on the *qui vive*.

Myra's thoughts made her hot. She answered quietly enough, however. "If you will tell me where to send a card I shall be able to give Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice your name for her next day at home." That would be a promise easily forgotten.

He hesitated, his brows coming together slightly. Myra had the instant suspicion that in some way St. Claire was beholden to this man and she was supposed to know of it and expected to make at least the return of amiability.

"That's good of you," he said, checked for the moment. Then he asked: "Where does Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice live? I'll send it to you."

Myra gave the address with the discomfort any departure from openness always caused her. She would have to warn Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice. She was suffering for being "an anomaly"; she hoped such incidents would not be frequent. Myra spent the remainder of the dance in parrying the many suggestions her partner made: His house was not finished yet; she must motor out with him to see the site. Had she been to the opera yet? His box was at her disposal. . . . At the conclusion of the dance she was rescued by Janniss, and felt duly grateful to him.

Myra had the feeling that she had not seen the last of Frank Hipbard, and her premonition proved correct. He ferreted out her residence, called more than once at her apartment, and, being refused admittance, telephoned her several times. He had evidently investigated her affairs, and as a result looked upon her as a subject worthy of further investigation.

It was part with the testing and tempting Myra met with

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on all sides. Hipbard was not the only man who attempted to thrust himself upon her. It made her nervous. At times she was frightened. She became as inaccessible to those whom she did not distrust, but in whom she detected too warm an interest. Courtship was not for her, and not so much because she did not feel free to test the men who approached her, as because of her shrinking from even the thought of marriage. Karl Janniss was the only man who saw much of her during that winter, except in the most formal way. Men found her inaccessible; even those that found her alluring. There must be a reason for it, of course; who was "the man"?

Much to Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's amusement, the "family retainers" were greatly taken with Mrs. St. Claire. They regarded Myra far less skeptically than those who took a lighter view of marriage. More than one of them grieved over a daughter who had returned to her father's house, and without the statutory excuse. They were sorry for Myra. Being somewhat better judges of character than the wholly flippant, they pronounced her a "lady," and proceeded to be "kind" to her. The elderly women reminded Myra of her mother, so she was without effort daughterly with them. She was invited to sedate dinners, family parties, mostly, and enjoyed the contrast to Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's more piquant entertainments. There was actually an air of domesticity, of stability about these old households in which the single union had been determinedly adhered to, that started an ache in Myra's throat. It brought back to her her wedding-night and her passionate dream of herself as a life-builder. . . . Well, perhaps some time in the long future?

And the next night she would be more than ever friendly with Janniss—determinedly friendly. She made it quite plain to him that they could be nothing but friends.

## CHAPTER XXV

**I**N sharp contrast to the placidity of the "family retainers" were the activities into which Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice carried Myra when she realized that Myra cared little for society; that she was in truth a worker. She took her then to her clubs, to suffrage meetings, to her charities, and to lectures, into the turmoil of interests woman has created for herself.

Women's clubs made no particular appeal to Myra; it seemed to her they were serviceable principally to the unemployed woman. In suffrage she was deeply interested; she was interested in anything that gave woman a wider opportunity. She saw no chance for any very active participation, however; the attitude of the suffrage leaders to whom Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice introduced her made that evident. They welcomed her, they welcomed every recruit; but it was active war they were waging; they were in need of funds and of soldiers capable of taking marching orders. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice was deep in their councils because she had both time and money to give. It struck Myra as significant that they had found no new or original plan in their means to an end; they followed man's methods very exactly. And the atmosphere that was created by all this public activity of women was much the same Myra breathed in the business world, concentrated, pungent, unrestful. Nevertheless, it was life as it was. Something entirely new must grow out of it. The peaceful homes were as much out of date as their rheumatic old butlers.

And Myra was being given illustrations enough of some



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of the problems a professional woman faces in her competition with men. Miss Wentworth imparted to Myra what she considered the secret of her success.

"I've never had a backache, nor a love-affair," she said, in her firm, even voice that was in keeping with her entire firm-bodied, clean-complexioned, and clear-eyed personality. "If the female mechanism is out of order a woman has a double fight to make. It will down most women. It will be just as well for the women who want to bear children to see to it that they give their daughters a healthy construction. . . . And if a woman's bent on success, she's got to look on love pretty seriously—not as a plaything. It's ridiculous, this popular talk that love should and will become as incidental to a woman as to a man. It never will be; we've got the children to bear. We're going to do the choosing and the deciding in the matter, though—have our children in marriage or out of it, as we like. And why shouldn't we when we are beholden to no one for our bread and butter? . . . It's my belief, though, that in the immediate stage of our development the woman who can dispense with the amatory altogether will be the most successful business woman. That's possible to some women—to the majority it's not."

Frank Hipbard, having been refused access to Myra's apartment, and finding her residential telephone well guarded by a capable maid, had laid siege to her at her place of business. Myra had been intensely annoyed by his persistence. He was not to be driven off, however. He engaged Miss Wentworth's services for his new home, with the understanding that Myra should have "charge of the job."

With some embarrassment Myra told Miss Wentworth the reason for Hipbard's tactics.

"Well, do you want to marry him—when you're free to do it?" Miss Wentworth asked, practically.

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"Marry Frank Hipbard! . . . Nor does he want to marry me; he simply wants to see how much there is in the situation for him."

"Of course. . . . You go ahead and decorate his house. Keep him at arm's-length and attend strictly to business. One thing we business women have to learn is to forget our old sex view of men. Then by and by men will lose their predatory view of women. . . . And that doesn't mean that a business woman need become unattractive. Her attractiveness is just as much a business asset as a good presence is to a man, but so long as we're sex-conscious the men we rub elbows with will be self-consciously predatory. . . . Never fear—we'll decorate Mr. Hipbard's house, and give him his money's worth the same as any firm of men, and the business side of Mr. Hipbard's brain knows that perfectly well."

Myra applied some of Miss Wentworth's council to her relations with Janniss—she attended strictly to friendship. If ever a man had a woman's attitude clearly defined to him, Janniss had. Still, the desire for warmth and closeness and intimacy—for intimate masculine companionship—the ache that frequently constricted Myra's throat—tempted her sorely to draw upon the lovable in Janniss. He called almost irresistibly upon her tenderness—the big boy in him, as well as the craving, eager artist, needed so much. And a caress from him would have been sweet.

Myra's own state of mind set her to investigating a little the women she knew who were "out for themselves," and she found that Miss Wentworth's type was rare. Universally the working-woman, the self-supporting woman, craved her masculine complement more intensely, with more singleness of purpose, and with far more care in selection than her idle sister—such women as Myra had known at Woodmansie Place, for instance. The desire might be deeply overlaid, or frightened into the back-

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ground by some painful experience, still it was there. And to Myra it seemed quite as intensely physical a desire as man's, but accompanied by the preservative, conservative instinct, woman's unconscious recognition of her capacity for motherhood.

Now that her work was less alloyed with anxiety, Myra thought more frequently of her own problem. Such a friendship as hers with Janniss was a possible thing; she felt quite free to indulge in even a more intimate comradeship with a man who knew her background and her present difficulties, who understood as well as Janniss appeared to understand her; but to most men her position appeared so equivocal, so tempting an opportunity for encroachment, that in spite of her feeling of freedom she was made uncomfortable. But there was no prospect of a change. In writing from Washington her father gave a brief sentence to the subject, "Nothing doing with Justin—he's unchangeable."

And her mother in her letters now never mentioned Myra's difficulties. She evidently regarded matters as indefinitely at a standstill. Irma was going to marry her Italian suitor, and Mrs. Milenberg was filled with another anxiety. The terms of the alliance appeared to shock Mrs. Milenberg. Myra received an outburst of indignation from Ina on the subject.

"Irma is simply buying some things she thinks she wants," she wrote. "It's not marrying—the thing she is doing; it's just a 'deal.' She is putting nothing lovely into her marriage. What *can* she expect to get out of it? I think it is dreadful!" Myra had always thought of Ina as a child, but evidently she was growing up; she was beginning to do her own thinking.

It was some little time, well into March, before Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice came to Myra with the inevitable report: "My dear, the news of your separation is circulating now among the people you knew at Woodmansie



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Place, and Justin is having a deal of sympathy both masculine and feminine heaped upon him. You are a very black sheep in their estimation. In spite of his irreproachable exterior, every woman has suspected Justin of having for years secretly broken the Seventh Commandment; but there he is a man, poor dear! But you have committed the much more unpardonable sin. You have set at naught their beautiful little ideals: woman's preordination to suffering; her mission as regenerator of the man she marries—the somewhat amusing combination of passivity and angelic activity, the idyllic conceptions fostered by man that have so long possessed woman's imagination. In short, you have set at naught 'woman's sphere.' In addition you are accused of ambition, extravagance, and coldness. They are quite bitter in their disapprobation of you."

Myra had learned Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice exceedingly well. The little woman was genuinely fond of her, and deeply interested in her future. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice was not birdlike when disturbed; she was inclined then to be oracular. There was something still to be said.

So, though her color rose, Myra asked, quietly, "And what more?"

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice hesitated. "Oh, people are always ready to supply a motive."

Myra regarded her steadily. "I left my husband for love of another man?"

"Yes—"

"Who?"

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice hesitated again. She wished intensely that she had never aspired to be a shaper of destiny. "Possibly the suggestion emanated from Justin. It is Adele who is talking here. I shall have a little word to say to Adele Courland."

Myra had often thought of St. Claire's accusation, the grip of his hand on her wrist. And as a result she had

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taken a certain satisfaction in her blameless friendship with Janniss. "Karl Janniss, I suppose," she said, evenly. "I hardly thought Justin would dare—a thing as foundationless as that." She looked down at her hand, living over the recollection.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice studied her averted face curiously. Had she really no idea that Janniss loved her? If she had not, Janniss had behaved more admirably than most men would under the circumstances. It was a decided bit of scandal that was being circulated; it was going to make it difficult for Myra socially. . . . Should she tell Myra that Janniss was in love with her? How much would it be best for her to say? . . . She decided to say very little—let things take their course. Something was sure to come of it all.

"Possibly it was your coming to New York that has given some sort of foundation to the report."

"Adele and Justin simply judge me by themselves," Myra said. She looked full at her visitor, her eyes dilated as always when moved. "Janniss has proved himself my good friend," she said, with a touch of her father's decision. "I have no intention of parting with his friendship."

"There is no reason why you should. When the thing comes to Janniss's ears, if he is the man I think he is, he will mention it to you—or you will forestall him and speak of it to him," Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice advised, smoothly. "*Une éclaircissement naturelle*. . . . Then your father should be consulted." She could not refrain from putting that small finger in her neighbor's pie.

"There is nothing to clear up," Myra returned, her voice vibrant with feeling. "There is nothing between Janniss and me. We are friends, and so we will remain, I hope. . . . All I ask is to be allowed to live my life as I think best."

"But no one has the privilege, dear," Mrs. Du Pont-

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Maurice said, affectionately. "Each man is to a certain extent his brother's keeper—that is one of the laws of life. No one can live just as he wishes; it is a little mistake of inexperience, that idea of yours."

"I suppose I am mistaken in many respects," Myra returned. "Nevertheless, I *must* go my way. I have seen the 'idyllic visions' only once, and that was when for a short time I hypnotized myself into thinking that I should continue life with Justin."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice caught at the remark. "Yes, it has been that with many women, a sort of stupefying of their reason. . . . Do not think, my dear, that because I have carried tales I am out of sympathy with you. I understand you better than you understand yourself. I see on all sides the dissatisfaction with the existing relations of men and women. We are in one grand turmoil and uncertainty on the subject. There is a universal demand for a change—but to what? The trouble is that you people who can no longer see the old visions are too hastily evoking new ones. You are in such a hurry. You do not realize that this is merely the day of transition. . . . Sometimes I have a hot envy of you who have before you years enough to bridge the period and come out into the open. . . . My day is so nearly done." She spoke with deep feeling, rising a little abruptly to go, and Myra noticed for the first time the faint vibrations of palsy, the trembling of her friend's white head. It must be strange to feel that life was nearly done.

Myra bent and kissed her lovingly. "I shall go on groping."

"Go on! As well try to turn back the Falls of Niagara—with these two small hands of mine!" She held them up. "You are all groping, testing, experiencing, and deciding, and though it is a little hard to recognize, the driving-force in you is exactly the same as in the days of Pharaoh—mate-hunger, mate-selection. . . .



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Come soon to see me. I shall this very night dispose of Adele Courland. A maligner of her own sex, she!"

But Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice was still thinking of the "driving-force" when, a few yards from Myra's door, she passed a man who had just alighted from a taxicab. He was standing for the moment with face upturned to the windows of the room she had just left—Karl Janniss. He was visioning—Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice guessed what—the woman toward whom he felt urged. It was an evening of early twilight, so the street-lamp shone full on him, whitening his features, darkening his eyes, thinning his cheeks, showing the set of his lips, the look of restrained eagerness akin to hunger. She passed him so closely that her limousine almost grazed him, yet he did not recognize her—an old woman being whirled on up the Drive! What was she to him? . . . Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's little hands came together in her muff and held tightly. She was an old woman, and because in some ways life had given her little—because her arms were empty of love's greatest gift—desolation sometimes swept her. That man and woman had opportunity before them.

"And it need not have been, if I had had her courage," she thought. "If I had thrust aside my St. Claire." Then she shrugged her slight shoulders with a return to the humorous. "But forty years ago! Dear Lord! I would have been jailed!"

She was sitting well forward, with face close to the window, her keen old eyes on the lights of the river. It was a cold evening to choose for a constitutional, yet occasionally a figure crossed her line of vision. A tall man, his cane under his arm, and hat drawn over his eyes, had come beneath one of the park lights. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice stared, then sat erect, her little face instantly vivid. Then she gave her order:

"Go two blocks up, then turn and come back—*very slowly*. Come down the park side."

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She sat with elbow on the window-sill, watching, and presently the man came into view again, striding along. As Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had expected, he did not loiter until he stood opposite Myra's windows. Then he came to a stop and looked up. She could not see him as distinctly as she had seen Janniss, but she could see what he did. He had come to a full stop. He walked on and stopped again. Then abruptly he turned aside and descended the steps into the park. On the path below he could walk up and down if he wished, and not be remarked from the street.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice leaned back, her look a little blank. "That Alyth man!" she said, softly. "And he's not been near me, nor once to see her, yet he keeps watch like that! . . . And with the thermometer at zero! . . . It appears to be a germ that neither boiling nor freezing will kill. . . . And she—of all the unconscious beings! How will it be when she finally wakes up?" She chuckled a little, though her look was grave enough.

## CHAPTER XXVI

JANNISS had made much the same remark to himself innumerable times. "Of all the determinedly unconscious women! If I wake her up shall I lose her? What in the name of Heaven am I to do?"

For Janniss was suffering. He was both intensely excited and fearful. He had kept an iron grip on himself during those weeks of friendly intercourse. He had the tormenting certainty that Myra was showing him only that charming outer surface of hers, tempered by the merest suggestion of intimacy, yet he dared not attempt to break down her guard. He was afraid to disturb her conception of the relation existing between them lest he lose her altogether. Like many another thoroughly infatuated man, he had no knowledge of his lady's mind, and, ruled as he was by awe and fear, he dared not venture a step beyond the line she had drawn. He wanted beyond anything to paint her, but not the surface Myra. He wanted to paint the woman loving and being loved; reveal the innermost woman. It had become an obsession with him, for he was out of all sympathy with the portraits he had painted of women. Myra would lead him to something better; he glimpsed greater possibilities in his art; he wanted a thousand things he did not have. For the first time in his life Janniss was attacked by a sense of futility; he was depressed to the point of despair, exasperated beyond endurance.

As Janniss had said to Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, he was prone to paint "flesh" when he painted a woman, and, had



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he carried his confession farther, he would have said that he had been unfortunate in his experience; that because his first pronounced success had been the portrait of a woman who had since become notorious on two continents a certain type had gravitated to him. With his passion for truthful delineation urging him, he had done justice to his subjects. He was becoming known as a portraiturist of "the temperamental," a classification that, though it was making him the fashion, angered him intensely. With a subject such as Myra he would show the world how exquisitely he could paint the soul of a woman. Both the soul and the body. He was no devotee of the unwholesome!

For Karl Janniss was not a sensualist. Had he been he might perhaps have painted the fleshly woman too frankly. It had been the desire to protect his art from too great realism that had kept his personal life fairly clean. If he debauched a certain critical aloofness that was his heritage, his art would suffer. It was the preservative instinct that had restrained him.

At any rate, such was the explanation he gave himself of himself, and the explanation he gave to Alyth. He had seen much of Alyth since their night walk on Riverside Drive. Alyth frequently found him sitting and smoking in the fading light, frowning angrily over his day's work. As chance had it, he was painting only women that winter.

"The worst thing that could have happened to me!" he told Alyth, irritably.

Alyth's comings and goings did not trouble Janniss. He came after working-hours, and usually, without removing hat or coat, and with his cane gripped under his arm, as was his custom when walking, he would perambulate the studio. Or taking an unoffered chair, he would smoke until the dinner-hour, silent or talkative, adapting himself to Janniss's mood. Occasionally he carried Jan-

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niss off to dinner with him, and the two talked till midnight.

Janniss was not in the least curious about George Alyth. He knew in a vague way that Alyth had a wife and children. The man appeared to have a life quite apart from them; still, his was a profession that took him away from his family frequently. Janniss had always thought of him as a tremendously ambitious man, possessed of a deep love for his calling—a very successful, but certainly not a domestic man. One never met his wife; something was wrong of course, some one of the many marital complications, still that was not his affair.

Janniss did not trouble to ask himself why an overwhelmingly busy man like Alyth sought him, for he was too wretched to question about anything. His work had lost its savor. What difference did it make who came and went? To a certain extent Alyth was a distraction. Alyth must know that he was mad over a woman; after their talk that night on Riverside Drive, Alyth probably suspected who she was. But what did it matter? He was not likely to have the good fortune to call upon Alyth for advice.

And Alyth was making his discoveries without asking a single question. No matter of what they talked, Janniss's refrain was always the same, "Things can't go on as they are—I can't paint!"

"You have done several portraits this year, and here are two more practically completed," Alyth objected on one occasion.

"Just the same, I am not *painting*!" Janniss returned, passionately. "I am simply touching up a few self-evident facts with color. They're the baldest things I have ever done. If I can't do better than this I must quit! . . . Now this thing of Adele Courland—though I painted it with my thoughts on another woman, I did succeed in working up an interest in what I was doing,

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for I was comparing her with her antithesis. I was painting a woman whose soul had so disintegrated that it was infinitesimal. Adele is *unsane*, if ever a woman was—it was her soul disease attacked, leaving her as I have shown her. The conception interested me.”

Janniss was standing before the portrait as he spoke, his hands in his pockets, his brow drawn. He had painted Adele in her red-gold gown, and he had neither exaggerated nor slurred her pronounced effect. His conception was apparent enough to Alyth; the secret lay in the eyes. To the average observer her expression was simply the subject of wondering comment. One critic had given paragraphs to the “burning eyes” of the portrait. Another, coming closer to Janniss’s idea, spoke of the “lost-soul impression” the artist had conveyed.

“The thing is well done—of its kind,” Janniss commented. “It ought to hang in a neurologist’s laboratory. The critics have yawled over it, but it doesn’t deserve their noise. They wouldn’t write such rot if they had ever visited a pycopathic ward. . . . She has a bit of soul about her still, of course, and I ought to have shown it.” He whirled about and glowered at Mrs. Carson Ostrand’s portrait. “What’s been wrong with me, anyway, that I’ve always given emphasis to the physical woman—as I have in this thing? And that portrait over there of Cecile Jerome. Cecile’s an emotional actress and always somebody’s mistress, as we all know, but I happen to know that she’s supported a worthless family since she was sixteen. And Mrs. Carson Ostrand is a mother. There’s that side to those women—why haven’t I shown it? They call my work subtle—perhaps it is subtle in the delineation of just one characteristic; but that is not art. Art is comprehensive. . . . I tell you I am not *painting*! Subtle! I’m as bald as the palm of my hand when it comes to painting women!”

“You paint the seductive woman marvelously. It is



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and always has been a popular theme," Alyth said. His thought was, "You are beginning to have some conception of what a woman may mean to a man, and your love has put you out of conceit with your former ignorance."

"Damn popularity!" Janniss returned, hotly. "Don't you understand what my complaint is? I want to do with women what I do with men—see the woman I paint from all angles; paint her comprehendingly and comprehensively. As it is, I tell only a small part of the truth about her. For some reason I reveal that bit of truth exceedingly well, but that doesn't satisfy me."

"Haven't you simply painted what is to men the most pronouncedly recognizable thing in a woman?" Alyth suggested. "I question if ever there's been an artist who has, as you express it, 'seen the woman he painted from all angles'—as he sees a man—and has told the all-rounded truth about her. For instance, whether the subject be maid, mother, or angel, why do all Murillo's women express virginity, and Raphael's women motherhood, and Rubens and Titian the sensuous? Were Burne-Jones's women ever anything else than conventual? The old painters adapted their women to some well-established ideal. As you say of yourself, they painted part of the truth, and did it well. The artist of to-day grants that woman is not to be explained by rule; he grants her a flourishing individuality; but since he is still too much bound by the conventional view to have any sort of understanding of her, he either falls back upon the old, well-established half-truths, or thinks he is accomplishing a revelation when he does a striking 'likeness.'"

Janniss relaxed for a moment into interest. "For a conventionalist at heart you are an excellent theorist. Your explanation is ingenious to say the least, but shades of the Madonnas, the Susannas, and the Flamma Vestalises—think of the centuries of misspent effort! And

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what a crying injustice to the sex!" Then he sobered into depression. "But it is no laughing matter to me. These two portraits finished, and I'm done with painting women—I'm fairly at a standstill." He sighed impatiently. "And what the future 'll bring God only knows!"

In an expressionless way Alyth studied the frowning man before him. With a satisfaction that Alyth himself knew was something more than cold-blooded he was watching Karl Janniss get the worst of it. The man spent hours with Myra, but to what purpose? It was the passionately jealous man in Alyth that was getting satisfaction, and yet at the same time he felt sorry for Janniss. He would have done him a kindness if he could. With a certain loyalty, man to man, he himself kept away from the apartment on Riverside Drive. He was afraid of himself and afraid for Myra.

And yet, sometimes when Janniss showed his lovable qualities, Alyth set his teeth on the suggestion of his own brain: that if Myra could love him, Janniss might prove the solution of her problem. It was a mixture of motives and feelings that brought Alyth so frequently to Janniss's studio. And now, as he listened to the man's restless misery, it occurred to Alyth that he had it in his power to at least offer him a diversion. "Why not paint a man?" he suggested.

"No one is offering himself, and I haven't the heart to search for a model."

"Why not paint me?"

Janniss's brows lifted. "*You!*"

Then there followed upon his look of complete astonishment the artist's instant appreciation of a subject worthy of his best effort. His kindling glance swept Alyth, his almost Indian swarthinness, his black brows shadowing vivid eyes, his thin cheeks, lips too firmly set for discontent, and yet in combination with his level glance suggestive of a certain smileless outlook upon life. A Celtic

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face with its touches of melancholy and fire—Janniss had seen its like more than once in the Scotch Highlands.

"You mean it?" he said.

"Yes."

"But why? You are the last man in New York I should have expected to be seized by the portrait fever." It suddenly occurred to Janniss that Alyth had in the last few weeks been testing his ability as an artist.

"I have two boys—they may value a portrait some day."

"I will paint you, with p'easeure, and try to do you justice." There was more of the old Janniss in the pleased acceptance than Alyth had observed in weeks, and Alyth commented on it grimly. Even on his death-bed Karl Janniss would quicken to artistic appeal. A woman would need to be very free from jealousy to mate happily with such a man. And with a hot concession to honesty Alyth granted Myra was large-souled enough to make allowances.

Thereafter, for a period, Alyth sat day after day in the clear north light of the studio, tight-lipped, somber, at times pale in spite of his swarthinness, his eyes for ever on Janniss's absorbed face. In his relieved plunge into interest Janniss revealed himself at his best. Alyth was forced to grant that Karl Janniss was sound. The keynote of his character was sincerity. He was honest as a man, honest as an artist. He had a passionate love of his art, and rare talent. And not a trace of commercialism. Alyth knew how Myra hated the purely acquisitive spirit. In many ways Janniss was suited to her, and she to him. Myra was a child-hungry woman, and Janniss had the quality so frequently allied with genius, a certain ingenuousness that was appealing. In his art he was subtle, vastly capable, and aloof. It was the rare woman who would adapt herself to such a nature and find happiness in doing it; absorb his love and feel no jealousy



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of the thing that would always be the core of Janniss's being—his art. And it was quite possible that the two were finding their way to love over the path that a woman so often in self-defense makes as difficult as possible. Alyth had an increasingly tormenting desire to know, yet the insurmountable necessity of playing fair kept him from trapping Janniss into admissions and, as his jealousy grew still more acute, withheld him from going to Myra.

He looked somewhat haggardly at Janniss as the days passed, and several times Janniss frowned over his appearance.

"You are not looking well," he commented. "Want to quit for a day or two?"

"No—four months on end of New York always bleaches me."

"Hell of a life—if one wants to make it so," Janniss returned, his voice thickened by the brush he held between his teeth. He removed it, making with it one of his clean, sure strokes, while he indicated by a movement of his head the three women's portraits. "Judged by those things, I've been a student of the unwholesome. But I haven't. I've kept pretty clean, on the whole; a bit too fastidious, perhaps. I've always been afraid to let myself wallow. . . . Perhaps if I had ever really gotten down in the mire and rolled in it I'd paint the sensual woman a little less alluringly."

"What it would have made of you as an artist is conjectural," Alyth replied. "As a man you are fortunate, for when it comes to learning your fate from a woman who is not ignorant of things as they are, what you have to say for yourself will count."

Janniss gave his sitter a quick look, but Alyth's face was expressionless. Janniss was silent for a long time after that, and Alyth guessed that he was pondering some decided step. Alyth felt a certain wonder at himself.

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Why offer the man whom he sometimes actually hated that bit of encouragement?

The next day, from Hipbard, Alyth heard the report that had brought Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice to Myra. "Some such thing was sure to get about," Hipbard said, with the air of a man who was far too wise ever to allow himself to figure in a matrimonial scandal.

"Bah! What fool talk!" Alyth said, contemptuously. "I know the Milenbergs and something of the circumstances. The St. Claires have separated—that is no secret—and Mrs. St. Claire has the idea many women have, that she would like to be independent even of her father's money. She came to New York to work, not because of Karl Janniss or any other man. It's possible Janniss is infatuated with her—that's natural enough; but I have no doubt she will send him packing when she discovers what nonsense is being talked."

"Perhaps. Still, that sort of talk is calculated to bring two people together if there's any truth at all in the thing. Possibly some one has an ax to grind," Hipbard remarked, shrewdly.

It struck Alyth that Frank Hipbard had given some not altogether disinterested thought to Myra St. Claire's affairs.

Alyth also thought there was design in the report, though he did not say so. He was very certain of it when, on parting with Hipbard, he went to Janniss's studio and found Adele Courland seated negligently before her portrait, with an admiring attendant at her chair-back, an erotic poet with the brow of Poe, and the manner of Wilde, and withal a somewhat simian cast of countenance, who had been much in Adele's company that winter. Janniss had evidently heard, for he was white to the lips. He talked stiffly to the poet, while Adele maneuvered Alyth away from her portrait, so that they stood apart. What she had to say then was expressed in the same half-

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malign, half-enigmatic manner in which she had attacked Alyth at Woodmansie Place.

"The complacency of Americans as long as a manifestation of nature is properly draped, and their prudery as soon as it is revealed *au naturel*, amuses me," she generalized in conclusion. "Suppose Janniss and Mrs. St. Claire are enamoured of each other—why make so great an enormity of so perfectly natural a happening?"

Alyth received her communications and her comments imperturbably, simply studying her in his level, contemptuous way, and so steadily and silently that even her cool effrontery was dashed. He was thinking, among other things, that her like should be kindly but firmly placed behind bars. What was wrong with the preventive societies that she was allowed to be at large, free to beget her kind if she willed? She should be taken in hand by the eugenists. But this was a thought aside from the thing that was absorbing Alyth—what was Janniss going to do? And while Adele undulated about the studio, talking now in French, now in German, to her attendant, her all-absorbing gaze a little shrinking when it rested on Alyth, Alyth's unobtrusive attention was given to Janniss. The poet was voluble, Janniss monosyllabic.

Then, when the door had at last closed on Adele, Janniss cast aside his smoking-jacket. "It's too late for a sitting. I have an engagement," he flung at Alyth in a smothered way as he plunged into the next room.

Alyth heard him moving hurriedly about as he dressed. The thing was plain, Janniss was going direct to Myra. In his place he would do the same.

Alyth went out quietly, and down to the street. He walked aimlessly westward, and before he had gone a block a taxicab passed him carrying Janniss. It was a cold afternoon, and gray; twilight would come early. There was a steady, hot throbbing in Alyth's temples; a coldness about his lips that the height of emotion brings.



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He looked after Janniss with an envy so profound that for the moment he could have done him a bodily injury. If he were in Janniss's place, and this opportunity in his hands! . . . And the man might win out. . . . And if he did they would sit long over their happiness. . . . What in God's name would he do with the intervening time?

He went on, and still without purpose, until he saw the usual line of waiting cabs drawn to the curb. He had passed them before there flashed into his mind other vigils he had kept. He turned about and, jerking open the door of the first one he reached, flung his order at the driver: "Up Riverside Drive—until I tell you to stop."

## CHAPTER XXVII

IT was late when Alyth again knocked on Janniss's door. In the dragging hours Alyth had spent walking about Myra's vicinity he had decided that Myra's need of love had conquered; just as with St. Claire it had conquered her. From the beginning he had feared it. One look at Janniss would tell him everything; Alyth felt he could not live the night through without knowing for a certainty. He opened the door when Janniss called, and stood arrested.

He had stepped into a room that was in confusion, for under a glare of light Janniss was sorting out his canvases. He did not turn at once to see who had entered, and when he did the two stared at each other blankly. Janniss was disheveled, his face colorless, the answer to Alyth's burning look plainly enough written on every feature.

He recognized Alyth without interest. "You, Alyth!" he said. "I thought it was the janitor. I rang for him."

Alyth's suddenly shortened breath made his question husky. "What are you doing?"

"Getting ready—to go away," Janniss answered, dully. "I want the man up here. Some of these things must be delivered in the morning."

Alyth closed the door behind him. With his back to Janniss he took off his hat and his coat, deliberately, for his hands were unsteady. The *relief* of the unexpected thing! When he turned about his face was still darkened by the rush of blood to his head. But his eyes were steady.

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"You'll need help," he said.

"Yes," Janniss returned, indifferently. "I'm trying to separate the sheep from the goats. . . . These two portraits will have to go unfinished. I'll write and explain. . . . And, by the way, there's yours, too. If you don't want to wait for it—perhaps indefinitely—why, just say so, and we'll call it off."

"You can take your time with my portrait. You mean you are leaving town?"

"Yes. . . . I've looked up the sailing lists. I can get off to-morrow. I'm going abroad—somewhere—I'm not certain where yet—to Paris, I suppose."

"What is there I can do?"

"Just set these things that are to be delivered over near the door. The others can go in this corner and be covered. . . . I suppose the janitor's out on a spree; but it doesn't matter. I'll get him in the morning." Everything he said was on the same dead level of indifference.

It took them well into the small hours to put the studio in order. It was a big place, the entire top floor—Janniss's home as well as his studio—and filled with his belongings, odds and ends he had collected in his travels, and his paintings. They worked in silence, except as Janniss gave his dull-voiced orders and Alyth questioned about the disposal of some article. When at last they were through, and had lighted cigars, Janniss expressed his thanks:

"It's been good of you," he said, with more feeling than he had shown so far. "You've not asked a question. I've been pretty nearly beside myself—I've had a knock-down blow; but I've sense enough left to appreciate tact."

"I understand better than you think," Alyth said.

Janniss's tired eyes questioned him. He looked more the boy to Alyth at that moment than he ever had before. Pain and weariness had sharpened his features, setting dark circles about his eyes.



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"You've guessed, of course," he said, simply. "I have been mad over a woman for a long time, and—well—the best thing I can do now, both for her and myself, is to clear out. . . . It has nearly done for my work this long time—you've heard me fret and fume—and now, if I don't get myself together, I'll go under."

Then Alyth asked his first question: "Doesn't she love you, Janniss? You're lovable, if ever a man was. I have found that out these weeks I've been about."

Janniss bit on his cigar to keep his lips from quivering. They had burned papers in the grate, and he bent and stirred the charred heap, fighting his hurt. But suddenly it was too much for him, and, flinging the poker down, he reached for a small framed painting that lay on the table, a thing that earlier in the evening Alyth had studied for a long moment. It was Myra, just the head and the beautiful lines of throat and shoulder; Myra at her brightest, feelingly done.

Janniss held it out to Alyth. "It is she," he said, thickly. "I suppose you have guessed. You know her. Do you blame me? Would you blame any man for wanting her?" And then suddenly the whole story burst from him. He flung his cigar into the grate and, springing up, walked the floor. "She has never given me a word or look to build on—she's not that kind. If ever there was an honest woman, it's Myra St. Claire. She's made it plain to me all along that she was nothing but a good friend. She's been obvious about it. And I kept hold on myself—I was afraid not to; the only hope I had was of making myself so good a companion that she would grow to love me. It was Adele's damned hinting at a liaison that drove me to make a clean breast of it.

"It began a long time back with me—in New Rome—when that consummate hypocrite, St. Claire, was courting her. I was mad to paint her back at that time—it was mostly that in the beginning. I didn't forget her, and

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those weeks at Woodmansie Place when I was painting that—"—he swore deeply when he spoke Adele's name—"I fairly lost myself. It was intolerable, that situation—those two people harnessed together, husband and wife. St. Claire without a thought in the world for any one but himself and his schemes; he's not above working a woman, that man. And that bright girl grown so utterly wretched that she had become mechanical! I was mad over her. I loved her and I was so damned sorry for her, both. God knows I tried to keep hold on myself, but there are always those who are keen enough to see. But she never suspected. She knew I admired her, of course, and set it down to the artist in me, and not the man. I didn't know any one suspected until St. Claire gave me a warning." Janniss flung back his head, an angry gesture. "Well, that was his right, of course, and I took my medicine quietly, as a man must who covets what is another man's legal possession, though, having watched the triangle at Woodmansie Place as I had, I might have retorted. . . . I put in a bad six months after that—until Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice sped her bolt out of a clear sky. You were there—you heard. Myra St. Claire meant to be free—she was here, within my reach!" Janniss stopped his restless walking about and, coming to the table, looked down on Myra's face. "The only painting I've done for a year that hasn't been mechanical has been this. To paint any other woman was deadly dull. I did a dozen of these, I think—from memory—and then destroyed most of them. This is the last I did, and I kept it because I wanted it to look at—even though it was no adequate expression of her. I did this the day after Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's dinner, and that night was the last time I urged Myra to sit for me, for when I found that she was showing me nothing but her surface self I didn't want to paint her—I'd have done no better by her than I have by these other women here. I wanted

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her to show me herself; . . . and yet if she had I suppose I would have gone mad—I'd have gone on my knees to her—as I did to-night—”

Alyth's eyes had followed Janniss's restless movements keenly, absorbedly, but at the final confession he sat upright, as if stung. “You did!” he said, through his teeth. It was the first remark he had made.

Janniss was looking down; he did not notice. “If I'd struck her she couldn't have been more taken aback. . . . And yet she was kind, for though I got out what I had to say wrong end foremost, she understood. It was not what I said that startled her—it was my taking her in my arms. She was like a girl about that, and she took what I said like a girl perfectly free to choose—I told you she felt free. I wanted her promise, and then I told her I would go to her father and, in the face of this talk Adele and others have spread, make him bring St. Claire to time. I wanted her divorced and mine.”

“Yes,” Alyth said in the same thick way, “and—?”

“She can't—love me . . . she'll never love me—” Janniss choked on it. He flung aside like a suffering boy, and, leaning against the mantel-shelf, buried his face in his folded arms. “God! I don't know what I'll do!”

Alyth drew a long breath. He got up and stood looking about him—at the shrouded studio, then at Janniss. . . . A boy's despair over his first rebuff. His bent head and shaking shoulders made him look very like a boy—as Dick or Jack might look some day.

Alyth took the step that brought him to Janniss's side. He put his hand on Janniss's shoulder. “Don't go under like this,” he said. “Are you going to throw away a future such as yours because of a woman? Love means a deal to us men, I'll grant, but to most of us our profession means more—all that outside life in which we're putting up a fight. Man was a fighting beast first, a loving one later on. Your art is the core of you—are you going to



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throw it away? You're not. Not any more than I'm going to upset my universe for the sake of love. It's the woman who can do a thing like that and not regret—I doubt if ever a man did. . . . Pull yourself together, Janniss."

"That's what I'm going away to try to do," Janniss said, through bitten lips. "And it's the best thing I can do for her, too. Handled as Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice advises me to handle this talk that's going the rounds, it will be the best vindication of Myra. I called Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice up when I got back here—I got her out of bed to listen to me. She has plenty of good hard sense, that little woman—when she chooses to use it—and she's the best friend to women I know. I'm to write her a note, and do the same to two or three others, Mrs. Carson Ostrand among them, and simply tell the truth: that I have been mad over Myra, and that as soon as Myra found it out she sacked me—told me to clear out. I can do that much for the woman I love." He had gained firmness as he went on. He lifted now and turned to the table. "And this thing I painted of her—I laid it out because I want her to have it. Will you see she gets it? And tell her I've gone, will you? She'll understand. If I try to write I'll only blunder into the whole thing again. . . . She likes you; she has told me so more than once. Do that for me, will you?"

The blood surged into Alyth's face. He answered only when Janniss, conscious of his silence, turned. "Yes."

"And you had better finish the night here. Take my bed or the divan—whichever you like."

"No, I'll go," Alyth answered. He pointed to the rim of light that edged the covered skylight. "It's not night, Janniss, it's morning."

Alyth had but half a block to go, and he walked it slowly. For any stir of life that showed, the street might

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have been a misty thoroughfare in the city of the dead, his hotel entrance the sealed door to a morgue. . . . But in the east the sky was opalescent, daylight tinting a bank of fog, an ocean sunrise with its suggestion of untraversable distances. There was the tang of salt in the mist that wrapped him, and Alyth took off his hat that it might touch his temples, clean his brain of the unwholesome strain of the last weeks. He felt infinitely tired. . . . Then somewhere to the south there stirred a murmur that slowly grew into a roar—an early train eating its way along the Elevated; the world in which “man puts up his fight” at close quarters was waking, and suddenly there lifted in Alyth an intense loathing of the crowded, breathless struggle, an actual physical hunger and thirst for the open places, for the smell of earth, for the sight and “feel” of rock.

And as he stood a wish that had lain in him since boyhood crept into his brain and laid siege to it. The oldest mines of the world—what did he know of them? His life-long passion, beside which love seemed the smaller thing, had its grip on him.

“Go—why not?” he said. “It may be the solution for me as it will be for him.”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

JANNISS had described exactly Myra's state of mind when he told Alyth that if he had struck her she could not have been more "taken aback." It was that: consternation over the blow dealt her conviction that a friendship in which the sex element did not enter was quite possible between men and women. She had willed that such should be their relation to each other, and for weeks had been feeling deep satisfaction in the working-out of her theory, and here, abruptly, she had been laid siege to in primitive masculine fashion, shown that she had been merely deferred to, made to feel that she had hurt a man beyond repair.

Their companionship had been a real pleasure to Myra. She had become attached to Janniss; she was genuinely fond of him. But to love him! To connect him even in a remote way with the intimacies of love! Such a dénouement! The possibility had never once entered her mind. Her recoil had been instinctive, involuntary, and the more convincing for that. She had shrunk from his embrace and the sudden hot pressure of his lips—startled beyond measure.

"It's not in me to love you!" she had reiterated. "How could you have mistaken me so utterly—I have simply liked and trusted you!"

There had been much to say after that, *une éclaircissement* in truth, and when, finally, just before he left her, Janniss had broken down completely, had flung himself down and, with head buried in her lap, choked over his



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misery, Myra's eyes had grown hot with tears, and what had always been his appeal to her was revealed. He was so like a hurt child that her arms had gone around him.

"I feel years older than you," she said, her cheek against his bent head. "Don't you see? It's always been like that, and it could never be anything else."

He had gone then and left her to distress and loneliness. Life appeared so utterly cheerless—a busy existence, but unsatisfying. Janniss's sudden departure following on the heels of a delightful bit of scandal caused lively comments in Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's circle. Then almost immediately the report gained footing that Mrs. St. Claire, like a true coquette, had encouraged the artist and then thrown him over. As the story ran it detracted not at all from her attractiveness; it simply commonized her, brought her to the level of the gayest in Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's set.

Myra shrank inwardly from the looks of smiling curiosity she encountered, and felt a chill contempt for the few who met her with an air of withdrawal. She felt the same disgust of society, for its utter inadequacy to interest that had made her social efforts at Woodmansie Place such a labor. Life was certainly to some extent hers to fashion as she would. Why should she trouble about society? It could in no way fill the vacancy of which she was acutely conscious.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice objected to her decision. "Do not forsake society altogether, my dear. Be satisfied to use it. It has its uses to one who knows how to take advantage of it, and it has a troublesome way of revenging itself upon those who are tactless enough to dispense with it."

"I shall have to begin and make a few offerings to it, then," Myra said, wearily. "A small scandal or two does not in the least disturb its equilibrium, provided the offender offers it a sufficient number of sweets. I realize

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that your set has been taking stock of me for some time and is about prepared to answer in the negative the question it always asks, 'What is there in it for me?' I have not shown myself eager enough to play the game. Personally I should prefer to drop society, step uncompromisingly into the ranks of the workers. But I know that Miss Wentworth regards my social connections as a decided asset. She considers social gifts a great help to the business woman, and she is quite right, they are."

"Undoubtedly, my dear, but what I have hoped for was that, moving among people, you would find a man you could love. You are meant for marriage. What I want is to see you with home and children. It is the only thing that will ever really satisfy you."

Myra was silent, and Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice studied her sympathetically. She looked cold and unhappy, as she looked at Woodmansie Place; the parting with Janniss had evidently been a trial. It was a pity things had turned out as they had; it would have been far better for Myra had she been able to love Janniss. Perhaps she was regretting her decision.

So Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice ventured a little farther. "I confess, my dear, I have hoped that you and Janniss would plan together for the future. . . . But you have sent him away."

"It was wisest for him to go," Myra returned, a little shortly. "I could never love Karl Janniss." There was only one person with whom Myra wanted to talk frankly on the subject, and that was Alyth.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice said no more. From what Janniss had told her it must have been a painful experience for Myra. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice sighed inaudibly. She had wished many times that she had not attempted to meddle in Myra St. Claire's future; there might worse yet come of it. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had never entirely recovered from her panic over George Alyth. And just

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now she was aroused by Adele's attack upon Myra, and the attitude of several of her friends that the mere fact of a woman's being discussed condemned her. Adele she had cast off with an expression of hot wrath:

"Learn once for all that I'm *woman's friend*," she said, cuttingly. "I'll not stand for the woman who maligns another woman. I have stood by you when you were being abused for your mad unconventionalities, because in such matters I refuse to draw the usual distinction between man and woman. And I have no intention now of peaching on you, but from this time on I do not know you, Adele Courland. I am quite done with you! . . . I have, however, a bit of advice to give in parting; endeavor to recover from the idea that every woman is born enemy of her sister. The conception is so old that it is at last falling to pieces, and God speed its departure!" Her white head had continued to tremble for a long time after she had parted from Adele.

It shook now as she looked at Myra, for she was anxious; a woman with Myra's mood upon her was a little incalculable, and in Myra's case there was a danger close at hand. The girl was hurt and lonely. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had a great fear of loneliness.

"Why do you suppose that Alyth man has treated me as he has, Myra?" she asked, a little abruptly. "Have you seen anything of him? I think he has behaved abominably to me!" It was Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's method of learning what she wanted to know.

Myra's eyes widened slightly. Had her own intense thinking upon the subject infected Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice? Her answer was even enough, however, and the same as always.

"I don't know—I have no means of knowing. I have not seen him since the night he dined with you."

"He has been in town, for I hear that Janniss has been painting him," Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice remarked.



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"Yes, so Janniss told me."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice hesitated; should she warn Myra? She decided against it. If an inclination lurked in Myra, any suggestion would work more harm than good. She advised her cheerily, however, before she departed: "This little stir of Adele's doesn't amount to anything, *ma chère*. Don't let it worry you; it will wear off. Keep yourself free of men who are attached, and all will go well with you."

"It doesn't worry me—as you mean," Myra assured her. "I am afraid I was born with a big indifference to the opinions of most people. There are always a few, however, that one hopes do not misunderstand."

Myra was thinking of Alyth. All winter she had wondered over his neglect. What had she done to alienate her friend? When Janniss had spoken of him as a frequent visitor her wonder had changed to hurt. Next to herself he knew more of her difficulties and the reasons for the step she had taken than any one else. She had felt so certain that she had his sympathy and approval. She had thought again and again of what he had said to her at New Rome: "If ever there is anything I can do for you as man for man, let me know."

What had changed his attitude toward her?

Myra had questioned herself endlessly, until Janniss's small painting, neatly packed and accompanied by a note from Alyth, reached her. A something hidden from her that Myra's swift intuition read between the lines hurt her so terribly that it amounted to a shock. Her friend in whom she had confided write to her in this constrained way! Write and not come to see her! There was something back of it all that she could not grasp. . . . Was it possible that Alyth misjudged her friendship for Janniss?

The thing had made her so miserable that she had had merely surface attention to give Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice. It was that night, after Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had left

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her, that there came as a tremendous relief the suggestion: the direct way was always the best. Had her acquaintance with Alyth been such that it precluded a straightforward question? She had had his note by her for ten days; she answered it now, writing as simply and as directly as she would have spoken:

DEAR MR. ALYTH,—Thank you for sending me Mr. Janniss's painting and his message. I think he did wisely and kindly to go. His work is really the biggest thing in the world to him, and eagerness for it is certain to come back. I am sure of it. I was too startled at first to think, but since, now that I have had time, I feel very certain that Mr. Janniss's feeling for me is not a thing that will do him any permanent hurt. I think it is an infatuation, not love. He thought of me always as the paintable woman. He saw me always on canvas, in color—he felt me in color. If he ever dreamed of me as a life companion, a life-builder with him, it was very vaguely. In a glorified way he looked upon me as a model. Some time he will love very differently. I have always talked frankly to you, so I tell you what is my conviction.

And I am also going to be candid in another matter. When we first talked in New Rome it was you who said, "One does not apologize to a friend." So I am going to ask without apology—why is it we have not seen each other this winter? Has it been my fault or yours or the fault of some third person? Your note is not as I have known you. Can we not be honest with each other? It hurts me to imagine that possibly I have lost your friendship. I cannot bring myself to *feel* that I have.

As always, I am

Your friend,

MYRA ST. CLAIRE.

It lay on Alyth's desk the next morning, was gathered up with other letters and delivered to him as his steamer slowly melted into the fog of the Atlantic. It lay in his breast pocket thereafter, a bit of sincerity to be met, to be answered, as best he could.

## CHAPTER XXIX

ON an afternoon early in April Myra was being borne smoothly down Riverside Drive in Hipbard's car. They had passed Grant's tomb, which Myra eyed with a certain unseeing steadiness, as she did the crowd that crawled over its steps and lined the park promenade. She had spent the day at Hipbard's country house transacting business in a business-like way, and for business reasons had consented to motor into town with him; the hire of a motor meant a charge to her firm. Hipbard's architect frequently rode in and out with him, and she was his decorator—wherein lay the difference? It was the attitude she had adopted and consistently maintained. And after his fashion, Hipbard was apparently endeavoring to adapt himself. He had dropped gallantry for jocoseness, teemed with anecdotes and *risqué* stories, regarding himself evidently as a wit. It appeared to Myra that he was really trying to treat her as he would a man. At any rate, it was easier to endure than his former sex-conscious encroachments.

But she had just been made to feel how vast a difference there was, viewed from Hipbard's standpoint. He had just made a proposal that had brought Myra's teeth together, and doubled into a fist the hand that lay in her lap.

"I don't believe in marriage myself—I've never been a marrying man—and I think a woman who is out for herself is foolish to indulge in it; but there is no earthly reason why she should bottle up her temperament," he had



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suggested, easily. "She needs a safety-valve; it's really a preventive measure—necessary for good health—a guard against explosion. . . . Doesn't it strike you that way? . . . You needn't be afraid to—confide in me, Mrs. St. Claire. I'm the safest of friends—"

Myra eyed the monument and the crowd. "No, I don't agree with you," she said, calmly. "I have a big respect for marriage—most women have, even when it is impractical. Women have, I think, as a general thing, a keen enough regard for our purpose in the cosmos to be able to restrain our 'temperaments.'" She turned then and looked at him, his thick hands and ample girth, and lastly directly into his shrewd little eyes, and her face was more expressive than she knew. "My observation of the woman who is out for herself is that if not morally restrained she is at least fastidiously constrained." She bit the last words off; she could not help it.

Hipbard flamed scarlet. "You evidently like us young."

Myra paled a little under the fling. The reference was to Janniss, and she knew it. It was not the first time she had been made to suffer for that unconventionality of hers. Then it suddenly flashed across Myra's anger that it was foolish to be upset by stupidity, that the man's misconception of her was laughable rather than enraging, that, like most men, Hipbard had a ridiculously hopeless jumble of impressions regarding the woman who was out for herself, the old conceptions inextricably tangled up with the new.

She did laugh, unexpectedly. "In the fifteenth century we were either angels or devils. In this scientific age we are either troubled by 'temperament,' wanting in 'temperament'—negatively, comparatively, or superlatively 'sexed'! . . . Then as to what I like: I like men chivalrous, or, that being out of the question, at least comradely."

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"Well, you feminists have set up your right to walk alone," he retorted, half sulkily, half shrewdly. "We're just watching to see how well you'll do it." They had drawn up at Myra's door, and his manner suddenly changed to the wheedling. "Come, be friends," he urged. "Aren't you going to ask me up for a cup of tea?"

Myra reflected that among other things he evidently thought her a fool. "No," she said. "You have your business friends; I have mine. All I ask is that they keep to business," and, nodding brightly, she ran up the steps, leaving him a somewhat foolishly stocky figure holding open the door of his car.

But in the hall Myra walked slowly, the light wiped from her face. She gave her hat and her gloves silently to her maid and, going into the window alcove, sat down. She was too tired and disgusted to change.

"Shall I bring tea?" the maid asked.

"No," Myra said, then, with the contrariety that had grown on her of late, she changed her mind. "Yes, bring it; it may rest me."

She sat on the window-seat and looked out over the river, but not with eyes that saw anything in particular. Such an incident as that of the afternoon was not pleasant, still she must consider the source and also the justification that Hipbard undoubtedly thought he had. Myra had been taught many times since Janniss's departure the truth of Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's assertion that man is the cruelest adherent to convention. His predisposition to the worst construction had been shown her by one man and another, playfully or significantly, in accordance with the nature of the man, yet varying little in the viewpoint. She was out for herself, and too independently inclined, therefore a subject for testing and tempting, the handling and the bandying, the soiling of a beautiful thing, man's need of woman, woman's need of man. She was clever enough to steer her way through it and regard the matter

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philosophically as long as she was not misjudged by those whose opinion she valued. She had written to Alyth out of her utmost sincerity, taking for granted that he must understand, and she had had silence as a reply. It was over two weeks since she had written.

There was where the hurt lay; the thing that had robbed her days of satisfaction and made her nights restless, that made the careful cultivation of certain people who were likely to be of assistance to her an intolerable duty. She had grown irritable under the hurt of it. It was as if something solid and accountable had dropped out of her universe.

She took her tea, then opened the notes that had come in the afternoon mail, and reluctantly lifted the evening paper. Under it was a letter bearing the English post-mark and addressed in a blunt vertical hand. She did not recognize the writing, and the foreign mark meant nothing to her. Who could be writing her from England?

The letter was twice folded, bringing the signature into view, and Myra sat upright under the surprise of it. Alyth wrote:

DEAR MRS. ST. CLAIRE,—Your letter was given me on the steamer, and too late for an answer. It was kind of you to miss me, and like your always perfect sincerity to tell me so. Thank you for caring enough to do it. I have thought of you often; I have frequently wanted to come, but as things were I would simply have been in the way. Janniss did not tell me until the night before he left, but I knew how it was with him. As for misjudging you—such a thing never entered my mind. Why should it? I have wanted for you the best life could give.

I am on a somewhat lengthy mission. I shall be almost a month in England, where I have several visits to make and much business to transact. Then two weeks in France, two weeks in Germany—possibly three—and then I go to Russia. I am satisfying a longing I have had ever since I was a boy. A mine is to me a great inspiration, as thrilling a joy as a master-



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piece of art is to Janniss. The mines of Africa and of South America I know; I have been often to England and the more traveled parts of Europe; but some of the oldest mines in the world I have never seen. I have only dreamed about them—the mines of Russia, the Siberian mines, and the mines of the Caucasus. In China are vast mines of which very little is known. I have begun on a sort of big spree, and with the deliberate intention of becoming and remaining intoxicated for many months. I hope to eradicate some habits of thought and feeling that were becoming too much for me.

But I should like to know a little of your life in the mean time—as much as you will consent to tell me. I will send you a list of places where letters will reach me, if you feel that a few words to me now and then will not be a task? I'll gladly tell you something of my wanderings if you care to hear?

Will you work throughout the summer? Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice will be gone, New York empty. Won't your mother come to you, or you go to her?

With always more than merely good wishes,

Yours faithfully,

GEORGE ALYTH.

A supreme relief may be a transport: Myra kissed that restrained letter as passionately as any lover. Her friend had returned to her. And when she again looked out she noticed for the first time that the trees beneath her window were in half-leaf, and that across the river the browns of winter were tinted with green. Spring had come suddenly.

## CHAPTER XXX

TO Myra's great relief one after another the people to whom she was forced to give of her precious time faded into the vague distances usual to a hot New York summer. Even from Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice she parted without any great regret, for during the last two months her life had grown so full and satisfying.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had not known what to make of her, Myra had changed so completely. In the early spring she had looked thin and worn, and appeared so listless, and then suddenly, when the summer heat was depleting every one else, Myra had bloomed. She appeared absorbed, her smile a little wistful, her air wrapt, nevertheless quite content. Something had come over the girl. If she had not known so well how little Myra saw of men, she would have declared that she was in love. Possibly it was her business success that satisfied Myra; Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice knew that she was becoming an important factor in Miss Wentworth's firm. Whatever the cause, the change was vastly for the better. She had been well pleased when she heard that George Alyth was traveling to the ends of the earth. A sensible man that! And Mrs. Milenberg was coming to take Myra away for a holiday in August. So Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice left for her usual summer in Europe easy in her mind about Myra.

The truth was that Myra was indulging in what she thought was a feast of the soul. All that had to do with the physical union of man and woman had dropped out of

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sight. She had always dreamed of the sort of satisfaction she was having. She was carried far above thought of hers and Alyth's disability; mentally she and he were free, and at one with each other.

Alyth's letters came as frequently as the Atlantic mails could bring them. They had grown pages long. Just as with Myra, he was giving his intellect full swing. He was endeavoring with all his will to drop out of his mind the thoughts that for so many months had made life a torment. He tried, and as a general thing succeeded, in reaching and in keeping to Myra's altitude. He watched for her letters as hungrily as she did for his, for it was increasingly plain to him that he possessed the intellectual Myra completely, and that was no small part of her. Her revelation of herself interested his analytical spirit. Her Teutonic strain, the German's inclination to philosophy and sentiment, made him smile sometimes, it so often and so amusingly jostled her American downrightness. Then again her letters contained flashes of humor and of keen intuition that delighted him.

But the thing that drew Alyth close, that made him more completely her lover, was the full and glad way in which she gave of herself. At times, and in spite of his determination not to recognize it, he felt that he possessed more than simply the intellectual Myra, a possibility that went to his head like wine. What woman would open so generously to a man her store of impressions, so heap his arms with her thoughts and her feelings, if love were not stirring in her? It made him intolerably restive under the necessary concealment of his intensely human need of her. She was showing herself so completely lovable that he came near to a confession; in spite of himself, flashes of desire escaped him.

But it was weeks before the truth broke upon Myra—not until in July, just before her mother came, while she was quite alone. Early in July Irma had passed through



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New York a bride, and Myra had written sadly about it to Alyth:

"Poor Irma! I felt as if she was pushing off into mid-ocean, and quite alone, to test the seaworthiness of her small craft. I have never before known Irma to falter, but in her cabin choked with flowers she suddenly clung to me. 'I wish it wasn't just as it is,' she said; 'but I was so sick of Chicago and having no position. I don't know—I don't know how it will be.' . . . And I am frightened for her, too, poor ignorant little sister, entering upon the great responsibility and without love to help her. And when I met him—all one side of life drained to the dregs! . . . The saddest thing is that the punishment for making a convenience of marriage is not visited upon the transgressor alone. It seems to me such an insult to the little unborn children."

Then she had written shrinkingly of marriage, and in conclusion: "I feel that there should be a more rational arrangement than a binding marriage by which a man and woman can learn the reality of each other—before they finally link themselves to the great race interest. I remember it was a question I asked my mother long ago—before I made my mistake. Just a little of the intimate knowledge that comes with marriage, and I should have been saved. . . . I have struck out for myself—cut away from my old desires. There is joy in accomplishment, and a great happiness in such a friendship as ours. Life is giving me a great deal, after all. I am content."

Alyth's answer came to her late in July. He wrote more briefly than usual. "I do not like to think of you as departing from your old ideals. Your old viewpoint was the right one—the only one. Don't lose that tremendous respect that used to be yours for the big issue—'life-building,' you once called it. Marriage is the only practicable outlet for that instinct that is stronger in you

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than in most women. It ought not to be side-tracked or thwarted. Your freedom will come one of these days, and then life will be open before you.

"To you the ideal marriage is a possibility. To me it is something more unsubstantial than a dream. I see no way out for me. If I had a different nature to contend with in Caroline— But she is revenging herself for the unalterable estimate I have of her. She will continue to revenge herself. I have discovered a certain deep hatred of me in Caroline that is the outgrowth of our mutual unsuitability. I did not realize the force of it until last winter I asked her for my freedom. I do not believe in the disruption of families, so I have always tacitly acquiesced to her ruling in the matter, but last winter my desire to be free got the better of me. I discovered in her the true dog-in-the-manger spirit—as I am she means I shall remain."

He turned then abruptly to other subjects. He had told her in other letters that early in July he intended to go to Siberia. But he was still in Caucasia. In previous letters he had written fully of the mines near Chiaturi, that produced one-half of the world's supply of manganese. He had described the village of Chiaturi, and the Kvirila River. The topography of the district appeared to fascinate him.

But now he wrote from Tiflis. He did not explain why he had come to Tiflis, or, as was usual with him, give any description of the place. His children appeared to be on his mind; he wrote at some length of Dick. Then in conclusion he said: "Myra, if it comes to you, the opportunity—a man you can love—marry him. Your happiness lies that way. Make your father straighten things out for you. And don't let thoughts of any man who has nothing to offer you stand in the way. That would mean shipwreck for you. If anything should go wrong with you, it would finish me."

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A letter utterly unlike any other—anxious, unadorned, unhappy.

It brought the truth to Myra. The letter had come late in the afternoon, and she sat over it a long time, not shocked, simply assimilating the wonder, making sure of it. She brought out the thick packet of letters and read until the darkness of a cloudy evening closed in on her; then, with the drop-light at her shoulder, she continued to read, steadily, absorbedly, her breath short, her hands nervous.

Myra was reading with a new understanding, seeing clearly enough now. His very self-restraint belied him. There were pages of description, observations on conditions about him, comparisons, comments on racial characteristics, the well-balanced views of a man who had traveled much, and with eyes always open and critical spirit alert. But the core of his thought, his desire for her, crept out in every controlled word as nakedly as in the occasional breaking-away from restraint that penned a burning sentence. Without asseverations he stood revealed her lover, impassioned, desperately in need, who had gone away as much for her sake as his, and to whom distance was proving a scourge, not a cure.

And she? . . . From the deeps of her came the answer. . . . Step by step, unsuspecting, unpremeditating, she had come into love, the immense thing, the dream of her girlhood, the longed-for thing that had grown with her womanhood—a love that was of the soul as well as the body, the essence of true life-building. . . .

And there followed upon the tensivity of emotion no regret, no fear. Their problem would be theirs to solve, and they would solve it.

Myra kept vigil that night, sitting in her window, sprayed occasionally with damp, for there was rain in the hot air—not a storm, only a steady dripping from the impenetrable blackness overhead. Sitting as she was in



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the bow of the window, an outthrust high above even the trees of the Drive, she had the feeling of being hung out in space, the river a black abyss dotted with lights, some that moved slowly, like lanterns borne along by invisible hands, others immovable save for their own starlike twinkling. She felt miles away from her usual surroundings, adrift in space, the littlenesses of life fallen away from her.

Morning necessarily brought her to the immediate present: how be true to the sincerity she knew he loved in her and conceal what she had learned? Was it necessary that she conceal and wait as women had been taught to do? For the first time Myra missed an outgoing mail.

Her question was solved for her. Alyth's next letter was no more than a note, brief, ill-written, only a few sentences, and expressive of overwhelming depression. Something had given way in the man. He was still at Tiflis; he gave no indication of moving on, no explanation of his brevity. In concluding he said: "To-night I am facing one of the incidents of life for which we are never prepared. I would not blench before it if you and Dick were beside me."

What did he mean? Something was terribly wrong with him, and she was helpless to reach him. She wrote anxiously and tenderly, quite unthinking of how she expressed herself, her love plainly enough revealed, and also without asseverations. She was simply an intensely loving woman in great anxiety over the man she loved.

Long before her letter reached Alyth the explanation came. It was almost illegibly penciled on scraps from his note-book, a stopping and then a going on, like the brief animations and long pauses of a spent runner: "You are not to distress yourself," he wrote, "and in any case you are not to mourn—we have found each other, groping in the dark, as it were; and though miles apart, we have joined hands. In the face of the great separation I can no longer maintain a disguise. I love you, and I ran away

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from the realization of it. If I had had more courage we would be together now.

"I am down with typhoid. I picked up the germ somewhere. I knew what it was when I wrote you last, and the fear that I might never see you again unmanned me. The fever had hold of me—I don't know just what I wrote. This is written in snatches, when the fever gives me strength and before it sets my wits to wandering—for there is something. . . .

"If no cable precedes this you may know that I am still fighting. If I pull through it will be because I cannot go without seeing you. That desire is all of me now—and it is tremendous enough, surely, to animate my body? Can death master me if I *will* powerfully enough that it shall not?"

The next was on a separate sheet: "I want you to have the truth; it may be my only legacy to you. . . . It came little by little, my hunger for you. I often follow its course. In New Rome your big capacity to love, as well as that fine sincerity that is *you*, entered into my consciousness. The two went hand in hand in my thoughts of you. At Woodmansie Place you compelled me, and filled me with anxiety. You have never been out of my thoughts from that day to this. I wished you well—I had the desire to watch over you, and always distinct from the craving to have and hold you as *my possession*. I have known from the beginning how much dross there was in my love—that anything you gave me would be bigger and finer than my capacity . . . and yet is it dross, that craving for one's mate? That obsession—the terrific hunger and thirst? I tried not to bring it to you. I cannot count the times I came to your door, and then gathered courage to go on. I struggled not to call out in you the same craving that was consuming me. For I have always known that you possessed mate-hunger in big measure. I saw you give it to one man, and because of

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his utter barrenness take back the priceless treasure. My love has not been all selfishness."

And on still another sheet: "They have taken me away from the hotel. It is not a bad place, this little white hospital. One of the nurses speaks English and writes it. She has promised to send this. She will write. She will cable if that becomes necessary. Her name is Mitka Kerkoff."

And on another scrap that on its other side bore neat notes of ore assayed in South America the year before: "If I go won't it be the best solution? Then in spite of me the best in me will have conquered. If I live I will hurt you."

And again: "I am desperately afraid about Dick. He is my son, not Caroline's. Their natures are antagonistic. She will ruin him. I wish I could leave my boy to you. The great unsatisfied mother in you would cherish him and make a man of him. It is the biggest urge in you, really, the tremendous creative energy of love."

And at the last: "I have given up my pencil. There are tears in my nurse's eyes. She will not forget you, for I have talked to her about you. . . . When the fever has me her cool hand against my cheek is always yours. . . . If only I could hear you say you love me . . ."



## CHAPTER XXXI

MYRA gave herself utterly in her answer to his cry; it might reach him in time; it might call him back.

If the completest love is the outgrowth of suffering, then the thing that in those days of waiting grew and grew in Myra until it was all of her was love at its highest. He was passing away from her, her lover and her child, the man whose touch she would never feel, the child, helpless and in pain, who called to her, but whom she could not reach. The world had grown vague; objects lacked substance; voices, intonation. Like the victim of hahshish, she walked isolated in a magnified space.

Yet she gave no sign, except of almost perfect silence. There was no one to whom she could speak. Her mother would think her love a sin. To her mother she appeared much as she had after her illness at New Rome, only older, graver, more aloof. Mrs. Milenberg regarded her pityingly; she had chosen to go out into the world, quite alone, to fight and be fought, this inexplicable daughter of hers. However wretched the home, *she* would have remained in it rather than do what Myra had done.

Ina often looked at Myra curiously—her beautiful, silent sister, whose life seemed to have gone all wrong. She had little more than a child's recollections of Myra. Before her marriage Myra had been away at school, and since her marriage, save for the summer when she had been ill in New Rome and Ina was in Europe, Myra had been virtually separated from her family. Ina had always been considered the backward twin. She had de-

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veloped late, both mentally and physically, but the woman had dawned in her finally, and perhaps the more decidedly because of long quiescence. She pondered Myra's case, and from quite a different standpoint than her mother's.

The heat in New York had been intense, and they had gone at once to the Adirondacks. The little inn at which they were stopping backed up against the mountain and looked down on a lake, one of a chain of lakes that were wooded almost to the water's edge, and when Myra was not sitting with her mother she was on the lake, though she did not go far. She was always within call, should a message come. That was the nightmare that rode her—the coming of the annihilating thing.

"You are alone so much, Myra," her mother complained. "When you go on the lake why don't you take Ina or some one from the hotel with you?"

"I have grown used to being alone, mother."

"I suppose it is the trouble you have had that makes you want to get away from people," Mrs. Milenberg said, sighing.

It had at last permeated Mrs. Milenberg's brain that Myra would never return to her husband. It was a terrible pity, her marriage and its outcome. Her heart ached over her daughter. She had changed so completely, become a silent, engrossed woman, apparently indifferent to every one except her mother; to her she was tender as she always had been. Yet when they sat together they talked very little. Each in her way was thinking, and dumbly suffering.

For that long year during which Mrs. Milenberg had obeyed her husband's commands to leave Myra alone to come to her senses, and had yearned over her from a distance, had aged her. There had been other things also that had been hard to bear: Eustace's wrecked health; the indications that her husband was losing interest in his family; and not least of all Irma's marriage. It was

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so plainly a barter that it had shocked Mrs. Milenberg. Just as it had shocked Ina. It had aroused Ina to a self-assertion that had added to Mrs. Milenberg's anxieties, for the girl had declared she would have nothing more to do with society. She had suddenly taken up settlement work, and to Mrs. Milenberg's consternation had declared herself a suffragist, in defiance of everybody and everything, carrying a banner in Chicago's mammoth parade. Milenberg had grown scarlet with anger when he heard of it. Then he had laughed. "Lord! what a family! I think I'll pension you all off, and begin again!" a speech Mrs. Milenberg had remembered. It had been a hard year, and, though stretched on the rack, Myra noticed that her mother's gray hair had grown silvery and her skin had the blanched look of age.

To the two Karl Janniss one day suddenly presented himself. He said he was on a sketching tour, and meant to stay for a time at the inn. He tried not to make his purpose too obvious. Myra received him absently; for weeks she had never once thought of him. But Mrs. Milenberg, as always, tried to do her duty. She chatted in her disjointed way, not finding it difficult, because she had always liked Janniss.

He talked and gazed at Myra. She was greatly changed. There were lines from her nostrils to her chin that aged her, something pinched and suffering in her aspect. In the few moments during which she had looked fully at him he noticed her dilated eyes. Janniss puzzled over her, completely nonplussed. He had expected at least some sign of self-consciousness, and he knew her well enough to recognize that her air of inattention was not assumed.

Janniss had wandered about Europe for six months. In Paris he had had the rare opportunity to paint Jean Corneille. He had lost himself for a time in interest in his subject, but, that bit of work over, he had dropped



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back into depression. He felt desperately lonely, uncared for, futile. It had brought him back to Myra finally. When he arrived in New York and found that Myra was on her holiday, he had come in hot haste. But how combat an indifference so utter!

Then while they talked Ina came up the steps of the porch, a boyish vision in her tennis dress, bringing a letter to Myra. Myra took it and sat quite still, holding it between clasped hands, her face become ashen. It bore a Russian postmark, but was not in Alyth's hand. Then she slipped away, and Janniss did not see her that day, nor the next, nor the next after that.

"He lives," Mitka Kerkoff wrote, "but he is so terribly ill that I must tell the truth. We scarcely hope. He was alone too long with no one who understood his language, and none to care for him. For days he was forsaken, scarcely even water offered him. But he is a very strong man. Perhaps it will go well. For your sake I pray. In a few days I write again."

"He is a very strong man. Perhaps it will go well." As Myra lay prone she put the letter between her breasts, a symbolic act, the instinct to warm a creature in whom life was running low. She herself had no will to move. Mitka Kerkoff's letter had come after a week of waiting that, measured by pain, had been a long year, and abused Nature was demanding her pay. She was still on the rack, but without strength to lift herself. After three days of prostration Myra dragged herself out to the porch and down to the lake, moving about again in a world that had grown even more unreal, for every sense she possessed was still engrossed in tense foreboding.

Janniss asked to see her, and was told by Ina that her sister was ill. "We hope it is not a return of her last summer's illness," Ina said, gravely.

"She looks wretched," Janniss declared, his own distress patent enough to eyes as clear as Ina's.

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The whole complication was plain enough to Ina's young wisdom. Myra and Janniss loved each other. It was not surprising; Janniss appeared to her very lovable. She liked his clean fairness and open manner. She liked the way in which he carried his head and spoke his mind. She had a great respect for his talent. They had spent much time together, for during the three days when her mother was sitting with Myra, Janniss had been, in a way, on Ina's hands. He wandered about so aimlessly, and looked so wretched, that she had come to his rescue. He had come to see Myra; in a way he was their guest.

"Poor Myra has had so much trouble," Ina returned.

"Why doesn't some one—your father—put an end to it!" Janniss exclaimed, growing hot in his misery. "I have a tremendous respect for marriage—I believe in the old-fashioned marriage—but a misalliance such as—" He stopped, fearing he had said too much.

He had touched Ina's open hurt—the terrible thing her twin had done, that had set her to thinking. She turned away that Janniss might not see the spasm that crossed her face. There had been no one thing to which Ina, in her young life, had given so much intent and painful thought as marriage.

"Have you been on the lake yet?" she asked, constrainedly. "If you row through the second lake and up the creek, there is an inlet there that is full of lilies."

"Would you like to go?" Janniss asked, anxious to atone for what must seem an impertinence. He had no business to comment on Myra's affairs.

Ina brightened. "Yes, but it is rather a stiff row. Still, if you give out, I have plenty of muscle."

The implication aroused Janniss somewhat. "The fact that I paint doesn't make me a Mollie-coddle! I rowed in my college eight."

"Oh, did you?" said Ina, with the air of one who reserves an opinion.

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But when they had crossed to the second lake, and at Ina's suggestion had drawn into the shade for a time, the thought that was uppermost in her mind asserted itself. "You say you believe in the old-fashioned marriage. What do you mean by that?"

Janniss had been thinking that he had never spent an afternoon with a girl like Ina Milenberg. He had had glimpses of her like occasionally, and set such girls down as "extra sensible," not in the least complex, not at all the type he cared to paint. Though slim and brown, and crowned with an abundance of dark hair, she was certainly not beautiful. She was too unformed, too boyish. But he liked her eyes, particularly when he noticed how straight and well-marked her brows were. They were fine eyes, dark and intelligent. In fact, though Ina sat backgrounded by a mossy bank, the greens of which delighted Janniss, the thought of painting her never once occurred to him. He was interested in her remarks, the way in which she said things. She seemed to have done a deal of thinking, for a young girl.

"Why, I mean as my father and mother were: devoted to each other even when they were old people, and always devoted to their children—always thinking first of the family, of each member of it rather than themselves. . . . What's decent in me was put there when I was a boy."

"But that is the new-fashioned marriage—the newest of all," Ina declared.

"Not as I have seen it! . . . Bah! some of the things I have seen that are called marriage!"

"Nevertheless, the sort of marriage you call out of date is the newest of all," Ina insisted. "I don't know much what men think about it, but I have talked a great deal to girls lately, and most of us *want* and *intend* to make marriage like that, the one union lived out together. From the moment I married I should plan how to keep my husband my own—how sensibly to do it—not ab-



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jectly, or just by using a legal advantage. I know any number of old-fashioned marriages that are horrors, and mostly because of ignorance. I think the old-fashioned marriage made over will have many more chances of success. It will not be so much a happen so, because now we are finding out some of the things that make marriage a horror. Intelligently honest intention always counts. If we marry more sensibly and beautifully, we are certain to divorce less. I don't intend to be led away from my ideal of marriage, or get tangled up in wrong conclusions, or be side-tracked in any way at all." She laughed then a little as cover to her very real emotion. "That is, I mean to try desperately hard to avoid it."

Janniss looked at her with a commingling of surprise and admiration. "You are right!" he said, decidedly. "I never heard any woman put it like that before. You have done some thinking."

"I have had to think," Ina replied, sadly.

It was her mother and father, Irma and Myra, she had in mind. Then it occurred to her what errand had brought this frank-faced young man to them, and why her sister kept to her room, and she sighed inaudibly. One might talk very decidedly, but life did appear an inextricable tangle sometimes!

Janniss guessed that her thoughts were not happy ones, any more than were his, and set to rowing again. But they had each seen below the surface of the other, reached a certain comradeship that was comforting, and in the days that followed they were often on the lake together, side by side, frequently, each pulling an oar. After a time Ina confided to Janniss her grief over Irma. Janniss had never in his life met a girl to whom he cared so to talk. As their intimacy progressed she had a way of not looking at him that was tantalizing; he could not tell except by her fugitive smile whether she approved of what he said or not, and he cared a deal for her approval.

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Ina had her own thoughts and feelings that as the days passed made her anything but happy. Janniss stayed on at the inn. He made no apparent effort to see Myra, and, for any sign Myra showed, she had forgotten his existence—except when he sat with them on the porch, and then no human being could have appeared more completely devoid of interest than Myra. She saw nothing, heard nothing.

It was Mrs. Milenberg who realized what Janniss's attitude to her youngest daughter meant. With an ache in her throat she was watching another child being tempted out into life, and the child did not come to her for counsel. And if she did, what counsel had she to give her? Evidently she had not counseled Myra aright.

Mrs. Milenberg's brow was heavily furrowed when she brought her anxiety to Myra. "Have you noticed how devoted Karl Janniss is to your sister?" she said. In spite of her eldest daughter's terrifyingly independent bias, Mrs. Milenberg felt that she would know how to give more "understanding" advice than she.

Myra's thoughts came back from a long way off. "Janniss devoted—to—Ina—?" she asked, vaguely.

"They are together all the time, Myra. Last night from my window I saw him say good night to her; his face was white and so was hers. He kissed her hands and wouldn't let them go. There is something serious between them; and I don't know what to do."

Myra put her hands to her head. Jerking her thoughts away from the thing that engrossed her every faculty gave her actual physical suffering. It made her realize that every fiber in her was sore. . . . Janniss and Ina! . . . But why not? . . . As her brain cleared Myra could see exactly how it had come about.

"He has no money, has he, Myra?" Mrs. Milenberg asked, anxiously. It was the first question her husband

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would ask, the first question every one would ask, and habit was strong in Mrs. Milenberg.

There was a glint of passion in the glance Myra gave her mother. "And what difference does that make? . . . What has money done for Irma and me? What has money made of Eustace?"

"I was thinking of your father," Mrs. Milenberg said, in extenuation.

"Suppose we think of Ina instead," Myra returned, less sharply. "Mother, I am glad. Janniss is sincere, though he does not always understand himself. But Ina is so sane she will steady him. He needs her, and she needs what is sweet and lovable in him. Mother, I am glad."

Mrs. Milenberg's chin quivered. "But everything seems to have gone wrong with my children so far."

"Not everything, mother dear," Myra returned, steadily. "Ina will be happy. I feel it."

Her own suffering made Myra the more gentle with her mother. She told her much of Karl Janniss, of his fine traits and his very real talent, and in conclusion she implored her: "Mother, don't let father mix in this! Let Ina and Janniss find each other first, and in their own way. Don't let talk or thought of money come in to spoil things. They are not thinking of money, either of them. What is it that has helped to spoil life for Irma and me? *Making a convenience of marriage!*" Myra was white-lipped and trembling when she finished.

With the passionate desire to help her sister, Myra searched for her, and found her alone and apparently busied only with her thoughts. Myra had guessed why Janniss had been pale the night before, and why Ina sat alone now. Ina glanced at her sister somewhat doubtfully when she sat down beside her. They talked a little of things in general, but to Myra's pain-sharpened eyes the girl looked miserable. Myra asked very directly:



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"Where is Janniss?"

Ina's lips tightened. "I don't know."

"I am afraid you sent him away, Ina."

The girl drew away from her a little. "You have noticed, then."

"Yes; mother noticed first."

Ina looked down at her restless hands. She had quite as direct a nature as Myra's. "He told me last night that he had been in love with you, Myra, and that you cared nothing for him. . . . But he says what he feels for me—is different—that it's different from anything he has ever felt. . . . Still, I don't know—"

"I believe it is different," Myra said, with conviction. "Don't you see, Janniss has always mistaken his artist's appreciation of beauty for love. With me—he always saw me on canvas. To him I was all sensuous lines and curves and color. He never thought of me as his help-mate—the mother of his children. But with you, Ina, he has never thought about painting you. He has forgotten such things as paint and canvas exist. It is the greatest compliment he could pay you. He is thinking of a lifetime to be spent with you. It is just you yourself, the dear helpful woman, he wants. I think Janniss has discovered his real need. If he has he will never rest until he wins you. . . . And, Ina, Janniss does not care for money. He could never do such a thing as Justin did to me. He will take the right view of marriage. . . . Don't you see what I mean?"

"Yes, he tried to explain how it was—that he was always mad to paint you. . . . But, Myra, it's his love of beauty of which I'm afraid."

"You mean of his art? That will always be a big thing to him, dear, bigger almost than love. You will have to realize that."

"I don't mean that," Ina said, quickly. "All that outside life a man creates for himself is as big a thing to

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him as love. To some men it's a bigger thing—as it is with father. . . . What I meant was that Janniss loves beauty, and I am so plain." Her eyes suddenly filled.

Myra put her arms about her and drew her close. "Are you plain, dear, with your fine eyes and sweet mouth and your head of lovely hair? And more than anything else the good brain it covers! Hasn't he told you that he loves you *because* you are different from others he has known? Hasn't he told you that he needs your good sense to guide him? That he knows you are fine and big-hearted—a woman like his own mother? . . . Certainly he has. He has talked to you about his mother—he never did that with me. . . . You are not grown yet, little sister. You are as thin as a boy. Don't you know what love will do to you? Fill out your cheeks and round your body, give you softness and color. I am not afraid for you. . . . Only, Ina, try to be sure of yourself and of him. Don't let passion rule you—that was the mistake I made. If he really loves you he will give you time to test each other in as far as is possible. The time will come when a man and woman who want to join their lives will be allowed the fullest opportunity. Marriage was instituted for a purpose. Why should we be compelled to enter upon it without any knowledge of our mutual suitability for the relation it necessitates? But why drag out what have been some of my thoughts? You will solve your problem as best you can—as I shall have to—if only I am fortunate enough to be given my problem to solve." She ended dully.

Ina drew Myra's lips to her and kissed her. "Why shouldn't you tell me what you think? We girls want to know what you women who have experienced think. And I understand perfectly why you think and feel as you do. What you have gone through must make a woman impatient of things as they are. But with it all

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you are sweet, Myra—sincere and sweet—and I wish you were happier.”

Myra had no answer and no tears. She was back again with Dread. Even with her sister's arms about her she was waiting, listening. She was still waiting when, several days later, her father suddenly appeared. Milenberg had only casual attention for his wife and Ina; he had very evidently come to see Myra.

He skirmished for a time without drawing anything from her. Then he came to the point abruptly. “Myra, what do you know of Justin's money affairs?” he demanded.

Her father and his schemes were infinitesimal things to Myra. “Justin never confided his affairs to me,” she returned.

Myra was thinking dully that if it had come to a struggle between the two men she meant to have no part in it. She would give her father no weapon with which to cut St. Claire's throat. She had no animosity, only a mental and physical recoil from the abysmal inadequacy that had been her husband.

Milenberg regarded her steadily. “Justin has come out pretty flat-footed with a proposition—astonishingly so for Justin,” he said. “It's your freedom for a sum of money—a big sum—that's what it amounts to. . . . Cool, isn't it?”

Myra's slow-drawn breath was a sigh, her gesture the involuntary one of wiping from her face something that made her shrink. Was not the torture she was enduring enough? Must she be sickened as well? She remained silent.

“But he'll not get it!” Milenberg said, with a sudden quiet vehemence that was cutting. “He's gotten all out of his marriage he is going to get. It's not safe for a man to show me his hand so plainly. Something must be pushing *Mr. St. Claire* pretty hard!” In Milenberg's



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sneer there was the deep contempt of the openly unscrupulous man for the hypocrite.

There was a silence during which Myra continued to look at her hands.

"Well?" her father demanded, finally.

"I have told you—I was never Justin's confidante."

He considered her for a time with a look that was not all annoyance. It was white of the girl to hold her tongue. With all her impractical nonsense, she was a pretty decent sort, and according to Milenberg's estimate of woman the quality was somewhat rare. He had not gained anything by coming to her. Still, it didn't make any great difference. . . . "The damned cheek of the man," to attempt to hold him, James Milenberg, up!

When her father was gone Myra went out into the air. If he had stayed a moment longer she felt she would smother. What comparison was there between such a barter as they had made of her and the sincerity Alyth offered her? . . . If only he might be spared to her.

Myra went down to the lake. She did not go far. She rowed into the shadow of an overhanging tree, an immense beech that was giving up its life slowly. The lake had sucked at the earth about its roots until they were naked, each successive wind-storm bending it a little, and a little more; when the autumn storms came the lake would claim it. "He is a very strong man. Perhaps it will go well." Myra looked at the dying tree and wished that she could pray.

When she was very little she had prayed. She remembered how she and Eustace had knelt beside her mother, and her perfect certainty that whatever they asked for would be granted. She remembered what they had been taught. It was a custom that had lapsed before the blazoning of her father's methods which had been the opening of Myra's eyes to an ugly page of life. She remembered thinking that the things she had been taught

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appeared quite inadequate to cope with such conditions as existed. The practical in her had set them aside as beautiful but useless. At Woodmansie Place, when she was casting hither and thither for guidance, she read the Scriptures through with a passionate interest in the rôle Christianity had assigned to women, and as passionate a rejection. Her passive mother was the outgrowth of such teaching. The new idea, an adaptation of a conception centuries old, the conception of development through the force of desire, a self-propelling toward perfection, from stage to stage, through incarnation after incarnation—in the blow it dealt to passivity, the yielding up of oneself to blind faith—had appealed to Myra. But now, with a suffering child's longing for the comfort blind faith has been to the many, Myra longed for the personal appeal to Omnipotence; wished that she could believe in it.

She was looking down, not up, into the water greened by soft filaments of water-moss, stirred by water-life, the myriad little creatures, devouring mouths ever fighting one another for existence, the right of might, the inexorable law—life exemplified. . . . She looked up with a convulsive start when a call from the water's edge reached her.

The end had come.

In a world that suddenly glared white Myra took the envelope marked "Atlantic Cable," and with the same instinct that urges an animal to find a sheltered corner in which to die she crept up to her room laboriously, with feet so weighted that they dragged.

She reached her bed and sat looking down the gray vista of years. In that space of staring silence she knew completely why those who faced a blankness as utter as hers ended life. . . . She took out the folded slip finally, and, still lighted by the white glare, read its single line: "He will live."

## CHAPTER XXXII

**I**N the weeks of convalescence and the testing of his regained strength letter after letter passed between them. Assurance after assurance from Myra of a love that would gladly wait a lifetime for its consummation, and from Alyth the passionate appreciation of her love and the expression of his willingness to leave the shaping of their future in her hands.

And when finally they came into each other's arms, it was as lovers at the plighting of their troth. They stood clasped, the intimate touch one of the other an expression of the unutterable joy and gratitude of reunion accomplished, a putting behind them of the terrors of the past.

They whispered it against each other's lips:

"I thought—I had lost you—for ever—"

"And—I—"

Myra's arms dropped finally, but Alyth still kept her held, and suddenly her nearness was too much for him. He lifted her and kissed her again and again, her lips and her throat, long and passionately, then wildly, forgetful of everything but pent desire, the accumulation of hunger and thirst. He murmured to her of it, and when she lay helpless against his strength, with face crushed to his breast, he spoke in her ear against her hair:

"I have wanted you so long. . . . I want you *mine*—"

And Myra was scarlet and quivering with realization, both of his abandon and her immediate, uncontrollable answer to it, too startled by the crisis that was upon them to be swept completely along with him. The sweetness



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of their first embrace, the commingling of love and gratitude, still held her too strongly.

"My love is—yours—it is all—yours," she reiterated, breathlessly. "I wrote you—I am promised to you . . . but not in this way—"

He knelt at last, his arms about her, his face pressed against her, slowly breathing his way back to sanity. She stood quite still, looking down at him, but when he whispered, "Forgive me," her hands touched his hair and he caught them, holding them to his hot face.

When at last he stood up he steadied himself by them. He had grown quite white. "I forgot," he said, thickly. "I forgot—completely—" He drew a long breath, trying to shake himself free of passion, an actual shaking of his shoulders.

The crimson had ebbed even from Myra's lips. She had conceived of a love that was both a great love and a great friendship, a thing that was sufficiently powerful to rule passion, not be ruled by it. But at the first touch of each other to be swept out to sea like this! The future suddenly appeared indeterminate, difficult, with responsibility always sitting on her door-step. . . . And yet, with the contrariety characteristic of a love in which the element of passion has definitely entered, she felt more closely bound to the man who compelled her to anxiety, to caught breath, and a guard upon herself and upon him.

But the future? . . . The responsibility, the decision lay with her.

They stood hand in hand, hesitant, Myra with lowered eyes, and Alyth studying her grave face. A lifetime given to waiting for a problematic union! With the ocean separating them it had not been so difficult to acquiesce: to write that she should shape their future as she would, that he was content with the knowledge that she loved him. At the very moment of writing he had known how

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impossible it would be. It had been simply a man's usual expression of a submission he does not really feel.

Night after night he had in his dreams held her in his arms, and his loss of self-control that had followed so immediately upon something far sweeter had been the result of his intimate thoughts of her. Alyth knew even better than Myra how completely she loved him. His happiness-destroying faculty of looking forward told him that with temptation ever at hand they were almost certain to enter upon the course that experience had taught him was unbeautiful, even when real love was expended upon it. An illicit relation, however compelling it might be, was an *illicit* relation, and capable of little idealization.

"It is not easy to go back on one's rearing," Alyth had told Myra in New Rome when she had reproached him, and he was true to his rearing now. Whatever the woman he desired gave him he would take; he had thrown the responsibility to her. Nevertheless, the *friend* in him that had always wished her well was infinitely sorry that things were as they were. *He* came near to warning her against himself and herself, his respect for the lawfully ordered, and her tendency to an idealized freedom of thought and action.

As he looked down on her he knew so well what she was thinking: "I know he has it in him to rise to something higher than mere physical demand. Am I going to love him less because of a moment's weakness?" How sweet she was; how completely a woman; how worthy of the best life had to give! . . . He watched the lift of her lashes until their eyes met, and he saw then how at the sight of his drawn face her eyes filled with tenderness.

She took her hands from his and touched his cheeks and his brow with caressing fingers. "The lines are all there still," she said. "They have always meant to me the triumph of will. . . . We are bewildered by the fact

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that we are actually together. . . . Thankfulness should be the biggest thing in us to-day—that you are alive, and that we have each other's love."

"I know that," Alyth answered, a little indistinctly. "No one knows it better than I. . . . It is seeing you—*feeling* you—that is too much for me—"

"Yes, I know." And then she said with a certain determined honesty that brought the blood into her face, "It was the same with me, only it—we—we would have been unjust to ourselves." She turned away a little hastily. "Come in where I always sat when I wrote to you. I cannot realize that you have never seen my house. It has been so filled with thoughts of you that you seem a part of it."

They went into the bay-window where Myra had kept her night vigil. The window-seat was bright with sunshine now, the slanting rays of the afternoon sun. The leaves on the trees beneath were brown, seared by the smoke of the city; but across the river where nature struggled against fewer odds, the yellows and russets were better defined. A fog, premonitory of evening chill, was creeping up the river; the sun would go down hazed with mist.

"Your marconigram saved me a morning of uncertainty. Did you send one to Dick?" Myra asked, purposely presenting another interest. The deepened fold between Alyth's eyes, his smileless look, troubled her.

"You received it, then. . . . I sent a message to Dick—and to Jack also. Jack will probably sell or trade the curiosity to some boy; but that little son of mine will have his treasured in a breast pocket, together with a thousand questions. Before sleep has him to-night he will possess the history of the wireless."

As he talked Alyth gradually regained his usual aspect, and a smile began to touch Myra's lips, the deep content in his presence; he had become again the stable, self-



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contained man she knew. He had the air of a man completely awakened to daily concerns; his usual air of faintly humorous appreciation.

"You remember I wrote you—the little chap sent me letters while I was ill. He took a deep interest in my welfare. Once he asked: 'Is it your head or your stomach that hurts, fathur, or do both hurt together? They hurt together when I had fevur. I wish you didn't hurt.'" His voice deepened. "I'm glad to be back with my boy, and with *you*. I shall try to take with a little of your idealistic completeness whatever joy comes to us . . . I wish it were not so difficult to rise above oneself." He turned abruptly to something else. "You know—I have thought as persistently as the revolving steamer's propeller of the time when my eyes would first light on you. . . . You are more beautiful even than when I left you, Myra."

"And illness has changed you very little. Your glance is as vividly blue as ever—just as keen and alive."

"Let me see your hands. I have always loved them."

He took them and kissed them, watching the color come in her cheeks. He was thinking that if ever a woman deserved her little space of courtship she did, and he was glad that in spite of the craving, unsatisfied animal in him, he had tenderness and appreciation to give her. It made it more possible for him to forgive himself. He held her hands and caressed them.

"What have they been doing these last weeks?"

"Working hard—or rather my brain has. I am earning a salary again. I see a partnership in view; I am happy over it."

"You are a big woman," he said. "You will reach greater dimensions if unhampered by me; I have always known that."

"Hush—you hurt me! . . . The capacity to love is the biggest thing in me, and you have called out my love.

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Mere accomplishment without love to sweeten it means little to me. So if I ever reach big dimensions it will be through you."

They talked until the sun reached the horizon, an exchange of personal details, disjointed talk, lovers' talk. In her letters Myra had told of Ina and Janniss. She spoke of them now with deep satisfaction. Janniss had gone to New Rome with Ina and her mother.

"They are really discovering each other; they will not make the mistake I made."

Alyth moved restlessly. "Some of us seem destined for mistakes." And he added with sudden bitterness, "Ina and Janniss have better fortune than was dealt out to us."

"Do we love each other the less because of our misfortunes?"

Alyth only looked at her. She was a visionary, but how utterly lovable!

The sun, blanketed in golden mist, had dropped behind the hills opposite, and suddenly they were in shadow, the oncoming of an October evening chilled and dimmed by fog.

"You must go," Myra said, then. "We are forgetting Dick."

"No. I shall have him till bedtime, and in the morning; but you I have for only a short hour or two. . . . Still, I must go—"

Myra rose to give him decision, and he stood looking at her as he had when he had lifted her up and held her, for the actuality of separation was taking possession of him, the thought of the night to be lived through with his arms empty. He put heavy hands on her shoulders, a more iron grip than he realized. The man who had kissed her hands had fled.

"Myra," he said, tersely, "you know what is before us. . . . I shall do my best, but I can't play with love

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long—not with you. I dare not kiss you now. . . . It's for you to decide."

They looked long into each other's eyes, and Myra slowly whitened. "I must have time—to think it out," she said, steadily.

He drew her toward him, then set her aside, and with an inarticulate word about the morrow was gone.

In the days that followed the question pressed more and more persistently upon Myra: how, with always the desire of their more complete unity urging her, was she to meet this demand that in spite of Alyth's tenderness, of his frequent self-depreciation, so suddenly leaped up and called upon her? . . . And to which she answered. She did answer, and he knew it. . . . And not only the sudden demand, but the continuous craving that as the days passed edged every word and act of his, and that she felt was more and more dominating her? How meet it so as best to conserve their happiness? . . . The sudden self-restraints, the as sudden lapses of control, the half-intimacy to which they were of necessity subjected, and the growing irritation against a hopeless future, were wearing upon Alyth, how terribly Myra could only guess by the continued strain upon herself. The effect upon them was telling. Because of the self-restraint that fear of themselves laid upon them, they were lacking in frankness, and the realization was a misery to Myra, for it was her conviction that without mutual sincerity a profound love is an impossibility.

But with always the earnest wish that her own desire for the man who desired her should not blind her; that she should not be yielding to specious arguments; that she should not be ruled by passion as she had been with St. Claire—Myra succeeded in withholding herself. Nevertheless, she was accustoming herself to the possibility of a marriage of their own making. She had come



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gradually nearer to the relation that might be theirs and was studying it. She considered that she had demonstrated the inadequacy of marriage as a promoter or conservator of happiness—unless unified by like intention and oneness of being—a spiritual and physical oneness. She had watched the same demonstration on the part of others. She had long ago decided that the mere binding together of the extraneous interests of two people might serve an economic conservation, but little else; and at the price not only of personal starvation, but of race deterioration. The marriage based on perfect unity had always been Myra's ideal, conceived in her childhood and fostered by more mature experience until it had become a religion with her. That children should be born only of mutual love, respect, and intention was her creed.

And now, under the pressure of unalterable circumstance, Myra questioned whether the relation possible to Alyth and herself would not in reality be a marriage? A union entered into with like intention, the completest test of character possible to man and woman, the foundation-laying of the most genuine and lasting happiness, that in time might be granted the highest consummation, a legal bond intelligently assumed, and for the sake of children, for the purpose of unifying a family.

Such a conception was not new to Myra; she had read and pondered its various presentations, but as actually applied to herself it was profoundly new, and at first startling, though when she considered the successive steps that had led to such a possibility she realized that she had acquired the germ far back in her childhood, when with pained understanding she had observed marriage as practised by her father and mother, and by others. In her doubts over St. Claire she had questioned her mother: "Until I eat his bread and sleep in his arms will I ever really know whether we two can be one?" And her own

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painful experience had developed the germ. She had come early to regard a bondage to disunion as an immorality.

Then with a reversion to the more usual viewpoint, Myra questioned her right to judge and decide, to take upon herself the responsibility of free agency. Would she not be too arrogantly emphasizing her right to individuality? Why through the centuries had individuality been curtailed? Been hemmed in and dominated by law, if not for the conservation of some deep moral purpose? She had come face to face again with the doubts that had torn her when she had longed to leave St. Claire. She had allowed her doubts to plunge her into a purely emotional act, the return to her husband. Was she doing the wisest thing now in taking counsel of her doubts?

Nevertheless, it was doubt quite as much as Alyth's avoidance of discussion that kept Myra silent, withdrawn. She guessed that Alyth avoided the subject because he doubted his power of restraint. She also surmised that he shrank from any attempt to persuade her, and that his lapses of self-control were followed by a bitter impatience at his lack of will. Myra granted unhappily that there was not perfect harmony between them, and that was the thing above all others that she desired. Was she being retaught the thing she had always believed—that perfect love between man and woman is compounded of physical as well as mental joy?

Myra guessed only a fraction of Alyth's thoughts. It was true that he avoided discussion of the subject that engrossed them both; but because his reason could not sanction the radical decision he knew she was approaching. If an appeal was made to his reason he would be forced to negative her conclusions. As ideals he would have to grant them a certain justice and beauty; he could truthfully say that in the future there must be some ad-

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justment between a too self-assertive individualism and the inconsistencies and inadequacies of the laws and customs governing the most vital of human relations; and that possibly the reformation was in process of evolution. But the time was certainly not yet.

For Alyth knew his world exceedingly well. He looked upon it without illusions. He had the experienced man's practical knowledge of it. He knew well the punishment it meted out to the woman, and to a lesser degree to the man, who attempted openly to disregard its time-honored rules. His cynicism had often smiled at its careless condoning of hypocrisy and inconsistency; its complacent compromise with sin provided it was sufficiently covered to partially hide its nakedness; its virulent condemnation of every manifestation of human nature that went naked; its shrinking from unvarnished truth. A secret relation was the only one possible to them, and Myra was preparing to enter upon it without any adequate realization of the sordid details; of the concealments, the prevarications, the cautions that would be required of her.

Like most men who are either ethically at sea or too powerfully tempted, Alyth begged the question of right or wrong. From what standpoint was he to judge of their coming together? From the standpoint of the New Morality—the expansion of individuality—or from the Old Morality? And yet when at the point of death he had answered the question much as his Scotch Presbyterian father would have answered it.

Either as an ancestral legacy, or as a development peculiarly his own, Alyth possessed nerves highly attuned. He was keenly sensitive, bitterly disdainful of the sordid, capable of acute feeling, and withal possessed of a will that was something more than mere surface restraint. With the deeply emotional man's capacity for suffering Alyth was suffering. He was in both mental and physical torment. He was vitally, passionately desirous of the



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one woman, the mate of his selection. She appealed to his imagination and his sympathies as well as his passions. He wanted her so utterly that with eyes fully open to what was before them he meant to have her.

His was the masculine hunger that from the beginning of time has dominated reason.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

THE first day of December wore the aspect of April, smiling and then weeping, with a breath as mild as Maytime, until a little after midday, when with true American abruptness it was blown upon and frozen stiff by a gale, plunged into a swirl of snow, incrustated with ice, buffeted and beaten by a blizzard that came direct from the throat of the north.

From the windows of his office Alyth watched the storm grow. When midway in an April smile a whisper had crept along the window-frame, growing into a soft, whirling whistle, Alyth had looked up from his desk understandingly. He knew nature's signals well; he needed no thermometer to tell him that the temperature had dropped many degrees in a few minutes. Then the snow came, blown out of the northwest, not a blinding storm at first, only scattered particles, but ice-pointed. It was not until the sky became leaden and lowered into the semblance of night that the steady drive of snow began.

Alyth was doing nothing; he had done nothing all day. He was simply waiting, and too tensely for thought. It was a supreme relief not to think. He felt a certain riotous satisfaction in the storm; emotion was having its way with him, and it was in keeping for nature to go on a rampage.

Alyth watched the office lights, thousands of them, spring into life, dotting the shadowy outlines of the towering buildings, marking the height of lower structures. It was only mid-afternoon and already night. The storm

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made him the more restless. He decided that instead of waiting at the office he would go to his club, and from there to Myra. He could see with his mind's eye the swirl of snow with the river lights dancing through it that they would watch for a few moments, and then shut out of sight—the blinds drawn against the outer world, a night then that would be the more completely their own because of the tempest encompassing them.

For without any spoken word to give him certainty Alyth knew that Myra had decided. That that night, for better or for worse, they would take each other.

To avoid the crowd that would almost immediately congest the subway, Alyth left the office as soon as his club occurred to him, but not until he reached the sidewalk did he realize how appallingly cold it was. The gale was terrific, and rapidly piling the snow into drifts; long before morning the surface cars would be at a standstill.

From the club window he watched the Fifth Avenue traffic dwindle into nothing. He hoped anxiously that Myra had left her office early, as he had, and that she was warmly clad; it was going to be a deadly night. He grew so anxious finally that he called Myra up at her office, a thing he rarely allowed himself to do. The office gave him no answer. They had evidently all left early. Then Alyth called up her apartment, and from the maid learned that Myra had not come home yet. Somewhere to the west of him she must be making her way as best she could through the storm. He wished that he had forgotten the caution that had already begun to guard their secret, and had called for her at her office. If he had had his usual wits about him it would have occurred to him to do it, but since the night before, when, in parting, Myra had of her own accord kissed him, softly and a little solemnly, he had known what her barely whispered, "Will you come early to-morrow?" had meant. He had been too overwhelmed by realization to be anything but silent.



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He had found himself outside her door before his brain had cleared of the rush of blood that had blinded him. She had not needed words; his kiss had told her everything; a letter or a message would have been a banality. . . . But it would have been exquisite to have carried her home through the storm; the first act of possession.

While Alyth waited restlessly until time to call a cab it occurred to him that Dick might be frightened by the storm. He was always considerate of the delicate, nervous child, and more than once before when he stayed the night in the city he had insisted that Dick be brought to the telephone that he might be reassured by hearing his father's voice. The boy's imagination had always played about the mystery of the telephone, the delight of talking over it largely compensating for his father's absence. And on this eve of a great joy Alyth had a sudden wish to hear his boy's voice.

It was Caroline who answered. Her voice was sharp and strained with some emotion which Alyth at first thought was anger.

"Oh, George—*where* have you been?" she said. "We have been trying to get you at the office for the last hour. . . . No, Dick can't come—"

Alyth knew now why her voice was so attenuated. She was frightened, and he guessed instantly. "What is wrong with Dick?" he demanded.

"He's had a fearful chill—we couldn't get him warm—and now the pain in his side. He's been calling for you—"

The voice may convey more than words—Alyth was swept by a wave of dread. "What is it?"

"The doctor just came. . . . He says it's double pneumonia."

"Good God! . . . Is it bad with him, Caroline?"

"Yes," she said, in the same thin voice.

"I'll get the next train. Go tell Dick so."

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But could he? . . . He could not get a cab, the calls for cabs had been legion.

Alyth was glad the wind was behind him as he ran to Madison Avenue. He could try for a surface car. The up-town cars were struggling along, the down-town cars were stalled. Alyth stopped only long enough to realize, then ran on. At the crossings he was almost swept from his feet, buffeted and blinded by the driving snow. In the lee of the buildings he could travel better, though the coating of ice under the snow made it perilous going.

Alyth missed the train by a few minutes; they were still on time. It was not until he turned from the gateway that he remembered Myra and that long day of waiting; except for the one dominating thought his mental faculties had suffered temporary aphasia.

The Grand Central Station was not yet quite completed, and Alyth stood panting in an unfinished corridor while recollection returned, and ever afterward he remembered with dull shame the sudden temptation to go to Myra first for a few hours, only a short time, and then to his boy. The ugly thing lifted in him, swept him, and passed. The sickness of dread and the ache of yearning had him again, and with it the longing to speak to Myra and carry with him a word of comfort, of understanding.

He found a telephone, but could not get her; she had not come home yet. In the next twenty minutes Alyth tried several times. He was forced finally to give his message to the maid.

To be moving was a relief. In imagination Alyth climbed the hill to Manor Park Place a hundred times. In reality he sat tense and unconscious of the passengers that came and went, blown in by the storm or going out to meet it with heads bent. Through the snow-incrusted windows he could see nothing; their own rattle and motion covered the sound of the storm; it was only at the stops he could hear the wind whistle. He heard a man say

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that at that rate the train would never be able to make the return run.

After an interminable time exaggerated by the half-dozen stops, Alyth was free to fight his way through the storm. There was no possibility of running; it was a steady struggle upward and in the teeth of the wind. The snow had so incrustated the street-lamps that the way was uncertain. Alyth could tell only dimly what was sidewalk and what was street. He kept to the middle of the street as best he could.

Half-way up he collided with a man who clung to his arm and would not be shaken off. The next moment Alyth knew him by his voice.

"It's Benson, Mr. Alyth. I've been watching for you," he panted. "I couldn't bring the car out in this."

It was Alyth's chauffeur. They stood close that they might hear each other's voice.

"How is he?" Alyth asked.

"It come awful sudden, but the doctor's putting up a fight, sir."

"Is he conscious? Is he suffering?"

"It's his breathing, sir. Sometimes he knows us—he knew me when I went up to tell him I was coming for you."

Alyth knew well the significance of that struggle for breath. They went on, arms locked, helping each other along, and Benson's story was told in snatches.

"It's been so warm, sir, they set to work to-day on the dredging down below the flats. They had three scows at it this morning, two dredges, and a snag-puller, and the little fellow he saw them from your window. . . . You know how he is—sir, crazy to see engines and the like at work. . . . So then he was begging the whole morning for some one to take him near by where he could see better. But it rained some, and his mother she wouldn't have it. . . . I reckon it was about twelve, just after his lunch, when he



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went by himself. Nobody missed him till it began to blow cold. . . . They had me out then, and the gardener, too, and I reckon we wouldn't have found him as soon as we did if I hadn't remembered, after a while, what he had been begging for. . . . I found him down on the flats, tryin' to get home. He'd got wet through by the rain, and got mired in a slough—he was frozen mud from head to foot, poor little chap! . . . I got him in before the worst of the storm came, but, my Lord! . . . There was nothing they could do would break that chill. . . . Then the pain in his side came and he couldn't get his breath. . . .”

It was plain enough now to Alyth, and back of all his suffering there was a vast resentment. A little understanding, a little sympathy, and the thing need not have been. The antagonism of natures had ended in this! A blindness to every form of aspiration, eyes for only the material—and a child's soul longing to investigate that it might create intelligently. . . . His poor boy. . . .

And while the little soul was struggling along alone through the storm, where had his father's thoughts been? . . . Not with him.

Dick knew him. When Alyth kissed him he looked at him with fever-bright eyes, and suddenly smiled. “Benson—said—he'd—bring—you,” he gasped. “Fathur—I've got—a hurt—in—my—side—”

“I know, my boy. I'm going to stay here—by you. Don't try to talk.”

But Dick had his troubled confession to make: “I—ran—away—fathur—”

With the understanding that had made them friends, Alyth knew what to say. “I know—you wanted to see the big government dredges at work. They have them all up and down the coast, and on every big river.”

Even in his pain the child's eyes widened. “Will—we—make—a dredge—when—I'm—well?”

“Yes.”

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And then came the constantly expressed hope: "By—and by—when—I'm—a man . . . we'll—make—things—" And at his father's answer, before the pain stabbed him into unconsciousness, Dick smiled again . . . then sighed, "We'll—"

There began then the three days' struggle to which there could be but one conclusion. Alyth stood by and watched science tamper with death. He was grateful for the unconsciousness that knew not, guessed not. When his boy's blue lips whispered of "making" and "doing" Alyth was glad—it could not be all pain then. When his whispers were troubled, expressive of the nervous antagonism that had tinged his life, and Alyth looked across at Caroline's blunt-fingered hands that had not always dealt gently with their child, his own hands came together, gripping.

With the instinctive recognition of the life-giving power of love, with the vague hope of compelling back to life the soul that was panting to be gone, no one, not even Caroline, disputed Alyth's prior right to touch, to hold, to possess. The child's whisper was always of "fathur"; even in the height of fever it was the only word that was clearly spoken.

But when in the hour that tests vitality most, the hour of transition from night to morning, the struggle ended; when the spirit, the counterpart of his own that Alyth had understood so well, was gone, he gave the body over to Caroline's arms, and with a remark that the nurse and the doctor remembered. "I am sorry for you," he said, thickly, in answer to her sobs. "Take what you gave—the other is mine."

Through that day Alyth lingered in the house, sitting in the room that had been theirs, with the feeling that his child's spirit was near. Some device over which the boy

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had been working, a network of cords and sticks begged from the gardener, lay in a heap by the window, dropped there probably when he stood watching the new interest. . . . People came to him during the day for instructions, and he sent them to Caroline. She had comforters about her; he heard weeping and voices that answered; he heard Caroline's voice more than once—the same voice as always, quite unchanged.

Alyth was possessed of the idea that the body he had handed over to Caroline was hers—she should do with it as she willed—he was calling to what was his. . . . But with nightfall, when the wind rose and again the snow drove against the windows, there came a curious certainty; the spirit he wished to draw unto himself, that was near, and yet that he could not touch, was gone—out to mingle with the Great Energy that creates and recreates, finding ever new forms of expression. . . . But his son, the more personal expression of himself, the tangible presence that he could recognize, commune with, was gone for ever. . . . He was bereft.

And in that hour of utter desolation Alyth asked of himself: "Am I building that I may pass on into the Greater—into which he has entered? What manner of man is this I have fashioned? . . . And for a space he sat face to face with himself.



## CHAPTER XXXIV

MYRA tried to explain why no message came during those four days: things were at their worst; a hopeful message would mean an insincerity, and an expression of despair would be a depleting of Alyth's power of endurance.

But it hurt terribly, this being set aside while the other suffered, even the opportunity to comfort denied her. She had thought that for the rest of life they would share grief or joy together, that "for better or for worse" they would be one. Myra waited with love standing at high tide.

Late on the fourth night Alyth came. Myra had prayed that he would come. With all the accumulated longing of the days and nights in which her love had reached out and been unable to touch him, she had prayed for his coming. And one look at his grief-ravaged face told her what had befallen him. He looked at her with eyes sunken from sleeplessness, too lax with grief for even a word or a caress, gray-lipped, haggard, and she brought him to the fire that she had kept burning brightly every evening, a visible expression of the sympathy that had had no other outlet.

From habit Alyth stood leaning against the mantelshelf, and when she stood close he put his arm about her, drawing her to him. With a murmured word of love Myra's arms circled his neck, bringing his cold cheek to her lips, bending his head to her shoulder.

"Oh, to have you here again!" she whispered.

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He raised his head finally, and looked vaguely about the room, as if making acquaintance with old associations after a long absence, and then he looked down into her lifted face. "I left you all this time without a word," he said, dully; "but you understood, didn't you?"

"Yes. . . . If *only* I might have been with you."

"He had come to mean a great deal to me. It has taken me hours to realize that I have to go on without him. . . . I told you once—there was a time when I nearly abandoned him—nearly gave him up to her. I can understand perfectly the man who does that thing. I am thankful I didn't—the poor little struggling soul. . . . I gave him what joy he had—only I should have given him a great deal more. I can see now how I might have done more for him—a deal more." He straightened then and grew taut. "By what right does a child belong to a small-natured thing like Caroline! Is there no process that will give a woman like that *breadth*! Just a little understanding! Why don't other women—her mother help her to it?" Alyth's voice suddenly broke. "It—it need not have been. . . . Just a little understanding and it needn't have been. If I had been with him it wouldn't have been; but I—I sat engrossed in myself—while he—" He caught himself up, setting his teeth on a sob. "But I forget—you don't know—" And he told her, much as Benson had told him. "There was no hope from the beginning," he concluded. "My poor boy—"

Myra's eyes were brimming. "But you know that you were his love, his inspiration. It is a great thing to know that, dear."

Alyth moved restlessly. "It didn't save him. He went down under the same inexorable pressure, that solid incapacity to understand that nearly drove me mad. . . . I decided as I came back to-night over that interminable way that the other evening I traveled a thousand times over in imagination—I decided that I can't go back to the

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old way of living. She may have whatever she wants, she may have her garish house—I'll give it to her if she wants it, but enter it again I will not. Anything will serve me as a roof. What difference does it make? I can't make it a home, and that is the only really satisfying thing, the thing that in spite of all this ill-adjustment, and disruption, and unsatisfying substitution of the false for the real, is the thing we *crave*. . . . It's the backbone of the universe—the home."

There was something in his slow, steady utterance that struck cold upon Myra. He had taken his arm from about her; he stood looking down at the fire. She studied his face, its deeply carven lines, the mouth down-drawn at the corners, the gray hue that edged nostrils and lips. She also looked down then at the fire she had so carefully built, her heart beating quickly. This man she loved so dearly had become remote, inexplicable.

Alyth looked up presently at the windows against which the wind drove. It was a night of wind and snow, a second storm following upon the blizzard. He moved again, restlessly. "It is late," he said. "Until night set in, and it began to storm again, I didn't feel that I was alone. . . . But when that came I couldn't endure it—it drove me out. . . . I wanted you so terribly—"

The fear that held Myra broke. She turned so that they stood face to face. She took his hands and put them on her shoulders. "I am glad you want me. You are sick and cold with grief, but you came . . . because you knew that my home is your home, the only home you have . . . *and that all of me is yours.*" She spoke sweetly and clearly.

They looked into each other's eyes as they had on that first day, only now it was Myra's look that was brilliant, and the white face of determination his. His eyes had lost the daze of misery, his manner the aimlessness of grief.



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His hands settled heavily on her shoulders. "*I cannot do it,*" he said.

It was her dilated eyes, not her lips that questioned him.

"We cannot do this thing. . . . I am glad the hot, demanding man in me that for weeks has been deliberately calling out in you the same hunger and thirst that I was enduring, that watched you reach conclusions, that tacitly agreed to them while all the time feeling their entire impracticability, and the hurt they would do you—I'm glad for your sake that that man is for the time being dead. That man didn't really love you—he simply wanted you. And the life you and he built would in the end be no more satisfying than the life you and your husband built, or than Caroline and I built. We would both of us again be building upon sand.

"I know that you were perfectly honest both in your marriage and in the relation we had made up our minds to assume, a purpose, as you thought, fully sanctioned by your reason, nevertheless in both instances I think passion blinded your reason. Secrecy would be the only thing possible to us, and you are truth itself, Myra—you would be doing violence to the richest and best in you. And what sort of man is he who knows the world as I do, knows fully the risks that must be run, the constant sneaking and lying that would be necessary, the canker that eats away at all that may be beautiful in an unlawful union, and yet urges a woman such as you to enter into it? Who would be willing to subject your sincerity and purity to the cautions practised by the commonly dissolute, have you wrap yourself in a soiled garment? In case of discovery the world would never look beneath the garment to discover whether it covered a beautiful ideal.

"It is easy to say, 'My life is mine to live as I please'—it's not very difficult to think that it is, but it's a fallacy. Every last one of us is linked to the long chain of mutual responsibility, a bondage that is for our own good. We

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have certain laws aimed to guard the relations of men and women, the outgrowth of what small wisdom we possess, and a public opinion that in the main supports those laws. Both the law and public opinion may be to a certain extent inadequate and unjust, but they are *facts* not to be gotten over."

Alyth paused, then went on in the same heavy, steady way, as if dragging up from a great depth, and with infinite effort, each word he uttered. "It may seem to you that the shock of seeing my boy go has turned my brain. It is not so. It's simply that for the first time in my life I have faced myself, the man I am fundamentally, and that man cannot hurt the woman he loves. It is quite possible that he is of smaller caliber than the woman that is fundamentally you. I think he is. That he is hampered by his rearing, that he sees with the eyes of the less advanced half of humanity. Still, he must be true to himself, or he would work you an injury. That man who is really me has an inborn respect for conventionality, a certain shame at the breaking of laws men have made, a certain view of the man and woman who set aside the laws that attempt to govern sex relations. I would love you passionately, and I believe faithfully, in a free union, but by no possibility could I feel to you as I would were you my *wife*. . . . That is the injury I cannot do you, and it is to my everlasting shame that I did not tell you so on that first day when I begged you for yourself. I did not attempt to mislead you, but what I did amounted to the same thing—I simply allowed you to mislead yourself." He had finished, and except for the outside sounds that came to them the room was very still.

Myra had stared at him with a look grown so dazed that her face for the first time in Alyth's knowledge of her appeared vacant. It was only when he was done and her parted lips began to tremble that she spoke:

"But—you love me—?"

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"Love you? . . . I have never loved you more utterly than at this moment," he said, suddenly husky. "That is what I have been trying to tell you."

"Yes," she said, "I—see. . . . I ought to have known. . . . It's quite natural. Men think as you do." Her hand had gone to the mantel-shelf for support, and with the other she brushed her face, that characteristic gesture of hers when in distress, as of wiping away something painful. "We don't think alike, we have only feeling in common," she said, more to herself than to him, and with a certain bewilderment. "I thought we were one. What am I to do?"

Myra was true to the thing nearest her heart, that dominating desire for unity that had been the motive actuating her throughout. The shock of having been mistaken in the mental attitude of the man to whom she had been ready to give her all was far greater than the hurt of having offered herself and been rejected.

"I have told you the truth—finally—and at the risk of forfeiting your love," Alyth answered, in the same husky way. "If it is your decision to have done for ever with the man who deceived you, I shall have to submit. . . . But I repeat that I love you—a thousand times more than I did when I was ready to be untrue to both you and myself. . . . It has not been easy for me to say what I have. I don't know how I have had the courage to do it, for I know perfectly well that when I come back to life, the daily struggle and emptiness, the hunger for you will tear at me again. I simply know that once before when I touched hands with death I was impelled to tell you the truth, and that again I have done the same thing."

Myra stood for a long time with bent head, thinking. She had grown dazed and colorless under shock, but this white immobility of hers was something quite different. She looked up finally and met Alyth's haggard regard. "You are quite right," she said, simply. "For us to have



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come together would have been a fearful mistake. I am grateful to you for having saved us from making it. I am the outgrowth of a set of circumstances that have filled me with the thoughts that are stirring in women. There has been nothing particularly urgent to stir men out of the groove they have hollowed for themselves—you have not moved out of it—in spite of the fact that you think about some of the things I am thinking about. I cannot cast out the dissatisfaction that is working in me. I am in revolt against the entire set of conditions with which your attitude, the universal attitude, has surrounded marriage. It's not the particular form of marriage that matters; it is the lives we live under that form. If marriage cannot be made more moral than it is, I have little use for it. What great end does it serve? When Justin was urging me to go on with him in disunion he said to me of the woman who was really his wife and the mother of his child: 'Surely you are woman of the world enough to know that that sort of entanglement means very little to a man. The woman to whom he gives his name is the woman he respects and considers.' You have said practically the same thing to me. As you are a very different man from Justin, you would be true to the woman you took in free union, but your *thought* would be practically the same. It was your recognition of the fact that has made you honest with me. And I realize fully the compliment you have paid me." There was pride in her lifted head.

"I know what your viewpoint is, Myra—I realize fully the position you take. It is the utter impossibility of maintaining it in this day and generation that oppresses me. And I believe that, in spite of my adherence to the conventional, and your inclination to freedom of action, if marriage were open to us we would embrace it tomorrow."

Myra's shrinking was involuntary. "No! It would be

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the thing from which I fled—two people living together in divergence.”

Alyth stiffened. He put his hand on her, the first touch of passion he had shown darkening his face. “But the fact remains that we *love* each other. You are the mate of my choice, as I am of yours—the future, such as it is, is before us. What are we going to do with it?”

“I have asked myself—the same thing,” Myra answered in a low voice.

His look of possession, his unexpected touch, turned her hot, suddenly stirred the desirous woman, that immense necessity of hers to love and be loved; to be held close; to compel and be compelled. It rose in her and swept through her now, the fierce desire for the arms that had dropped away from her for a short time. And with the sweep of passion came temptation. What did it matter, their differences? They did love each other, and, held apart by their mentality, the future promised so little. Why make a struggle of life?

Myra glanced away from him unsteadily at the room where she would again have to be alone. Loneliness was a horror. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice’s words came back to her with a force that hurt, “Loneliness does strange things to a woman, dear.” In the few moments’ silence the outside sounds had pressed into the room, the click and rattle of an omnibus, the husky bellow of a siren, some river-boat making its way along through the storm. The drive of snow against the window was as distinct as a shower of needles. . . . And it would be so easy. . . . A little deliberate endeavor—warmth and comfort such as she knew how to give, then the touch of her lips, caressing hands, the night together—and he would be hers—the more completely because he had freed his conscience of a burden. The whisper, “Let us stop thinking and take what is possible to us,” would meet with a response all the more passionate because of reason suddenly cast aside.

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. . . And she would hold him. She had never shown him her power, that vast capacity of hers to compel, to satisfy and yet leave desirous, the passionate, sensuous, yet intensely fastidious woman that St. Claire had awakened and then revolted.

But her intelligence would not *down*. St. Claire had been unable to strangle it, and now, though throbbing to her finger-tips, Myra's brain told her that her own efforts would not be able to kill her ideal. She had struggled and struggled for it, that mental unity that should subordinate the fleshly. What would it profit her to gain the "hot, demanding man"? Or even to hold captive the conventional man who differed so entirely from her? With the certainty of the clever woman she knew that she would never dominate his reason. That would always stand apart from her. There would always be a cool corner of his brain setting in judgment. In marriage or out of marriage he would retain the keen, critical brain that was his inheritance. If he ever came closer to her mentality, merged his with hers, it would have to be of his own will, not because of any domination she could exert. . . . There was only the one thing possible to them.

"You don't answer me, Myra?" Alyth said. He had watched her color come, then ebb.

"There is only the one thing possible to us."

"Not to part, Myra—not that?"

"Yes," she said, the ache in her throat making her voice hard.

"You don't mean it! You can't mean it?"

"What else is possible?" she said, with difficulty. "Have you the strength of will to come and yet remain cold? . . . If you have, I have not. . . . It would be the same struggle over again, only now there would be the hurt of respect forfeited. You say—you have said more than once, that legal freedom is not possible to you. I doubt if it will ever be granted me. After what you



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have told me to-night, what is there for us but to stay apart?"

"I don't see how I am to live under it," Alyth said, evenly. "In one day I have lost all I possess. . . . But it was beyond me—that taking the easier way."

"And beyond me—or I would take it now—in spite of everything." Myra had braced herself against the mantel-shelf, holding herself erect by sheer force of will. If ever he returned to her, really hers, it would not be because of her tears, or because of the tenderness that was choking her. It was his reason that would bring him.

And when he drew her to him and kissed her, when every atom of her was conscious of his rapidly failing will, when a word from her would have plunged them headlong, the renunciation was hers. It was a little of her father's hard will that helped Myra to still stand erect; that kept her lips from love's response and her body from yielding.

Alyth put her away from him then abruptly. "You're right," he said. "For us it must be everything or nothing."

And she let him go.

But until morning reminded Myra of a day's work to be done she lay prone where she had once before kept vigil, and something ebbed from her with her tears—the sanguine spirit of her youth. Hers was a revolt against conceptions ages old. Alyth was still bound by them, and she had cast them off. . . . She had too arrogantly asserted her right to individuality and been punished. . . . They were divided both in opinion and by unalterable circumstances. The future stretched gray before them, a road without a turning, upon which they must walk far apart.

## CHAPTER XXXV

**I**T was the indomitable spirit infused into her by both father and mother that bade Myra get up out of the dust of the gray road and walk on. She could not lie there inert.

And in the numb days that followed it was the same spirit that prodded her. If she was to survive she must struggle, and with every energy she possessed. If she yielded to the feeling of desolation that pervaded her she would end in embracing the "lesser thing," call Alyth back to her.

Out of the urge to activity grew the letter that some three weeks later Myra sent to her father. Milenberg whistled softly over it. It was not like James Milenberg to become demonstrative over a business "proposition," but Myra's terse communication both surprised him and touched his sense of humor.

It was a request for a loan at six per cent., a sum with which to buy an immediate interest and a partnership in Miss Wentworth's firm. "I can make over my interest to you; that will secure you," Myra wrote. "If possible, I want to close the thing at once. I need the incentive."

Of her apartment she said: "My lease is up in January, and I want to take a larger and more expensive apartment—such as you suggested last year. My object is purely a business one. I should aim to make it an advertisement of what the firm of Wentworth & Milenberg can do in the way of apartment decoration. I must entertain more or less, such people as are likely to be useful.

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"Can you loan me the sum I need, and let me repay you gradually? I know I can get the money elsewhere, but prefer to borrow from you." She appended an accounting of the firm, what would be her liabilities and her assets. It appeared that the firm was making money. A partnership would secure to Myra a comfortable income.

"What's come over the woman?" was Milenberg's comment. It was only her change of front that had amused him; the "proposition" was as carefully considered, and as practical a business offer as he had ever had "put up" to him. It would seem that the business head that should have belonged to his son had been put upon his daughter's shoulders.

Myra's letter pleased Milenberg, for it fitted in so well with his own plans. For a long time he had wanted to rid himself of his family. They got on his nerves, harassed him. His wife had always kept "the family" so steadily before him, and to the end of her life she would do the same. After the years of neglect it was incredible that she should retain any affection for him; but for the sake of her children she intended to remain his wife. She had a tremendous sense of duty. She was a firm believer in the single union; she would give him no divorce; she had made that plain to him years ago, and had clung to her position as only a patient woman actuated by what she considers her duty can cling. He had acquiesced. She was right, of course. She represented law and order. She stood for the family. He respected her; she was a good woman. When he had lain ill in San Francisco the winter before he had actually missed her. But she had never known how to enter into his active life. She was not adaptable. As a change from business absorption he needed stimulation, diversion, excitement. His wife had merely plodded along, and in the earlier years relied upon the fact that she bore him children to hold him.



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She had intentionally and deliberately borne him children. He had never wanted a large family.

Well, he had gone his own way; found a woman who more nearly ministered to his immediate needs. He had set his family aside as much as possible, and now it looked as if he could rid himself of the responsibility altogether. With Ina married, and Myra embarked upon a business career, he would be in a position to make a definite provision for his family and have them off his mind. He had noticed since his illness that he was more easily tired and bothered than he used to be. He got restless even over business; the desire to cut loose from it all had grown rapidly on him during the last year. He had plenty of money; he wanted to travel about a bit, to "freshen up"; he had been pretty steadily at it all these years.

Myra's letter pleased Milenberg so much that he telegraphed his acceptance of her "proposition." And when the "deal" was completed, and he had locked away the papers that in due time he meant to turn over to her, he gave a little time to the consideration of her affairs—other than business. She had not mentioned her matrimonial tangle. . . . Well, the "Mills of God" ground slowly, but they ground exceedingly small—if one was a fool—and St. Claire was a fool. . . . But certainly something out of the ordinary had come over Myra. The cool, hard tone of her letters interested Milenberg. In March he intended to spend some time in New York; he would see then what it all meant.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

HER father was not the only one who was asking, "What has come over Myra?" Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, Janniss, Miss Wentworth—every one who knew Myra St. Claire well asked of themselves the question. Myra was not quite twenty-five; to all who came in contact with her that winter she appeared more like a mature woman of thirty-five. In shrewdness and business alertness, in sheer business capability, she outstripped Miss Wentworth. She attracted business. The hesitant customer was invariably captured by her, even led into enthusiasm. The dogmatic, after their ideas had been sufficiently manipulated by Myra, found themselves adopting the very color scheme they had made up their minds not to have, and emerged from the struggle fully convinced that they had taught the firm of Wentworth & Milenberg a thing or two.

Myra certainly possessed much of her father's business magnetism, but that would not have been so valuable an asset had it not been joined with a real genius for household decoration. Myra's innately accurate feeling for color combinations had been given poignancy by painful experience. The garish display at Milenberg Villa had always sickened her, and St. Claire's somewhat less crude but wholly inartistic exhibition at Woodmansie Place had equally offended. She had always had as part of her consciousness the ideal home beautiful. She had been in the habit of closing her eyes on the home unbeautiful that she might see visions. The subtlety in color arrangement that

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Myra now displayed was the outgrowth of long self-training. It would have been impossible for her to have acquired such perfection in only a year's experience. Her year's experience had simply taught her practical methods of application. But to her partner she appeared a wonder. It was Miss Wentworth who suggested that it was her duty to herself and the firm to go abroad for some months of study—for as long as the firm could spare her.

"Next spring—possibly," Myra answered, without enthusiasm.

She wanted to stay where she was—near Alyth. She could not part with that feeling of proximity. For deep in her, unacknowledged, hope had lifted. Life was made up of many years, and neither she nor Alyth was old. She had feared when they parted that he might again travel to the ends of the earth; but he had not done so. He also had gone on with the colorless daily round. If only she could know just how it was with him? He had kept his word: as it could not be "everything" with them, it was "nothing." It was March now, and there had been not a word or a line from him.

Though not particularly acute in such matters, Miss Wentworth felt the existence of something unexplained; some determined purpose in the woman who was doing the work of three ordinary women. It was not mere business ambition that was actuating her partner. She had occasionally seen Myra's face when it was in repose, the look only an unhappy woman wears. Just what was it? What had come over her?

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, who, unknown to her friends, had been, as she expressed it to Myra, "studying the militants of England at close range," did not return to New York until March. She sought Myra at once. Talking with her little clawlike hands as well as her nimble tongue, she poured out her experiences and her observations.



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"My dear," she concluded, with emphasis, "the thing that appalls one in England is its *wasted womanhood*. It is *that* is hurling itself against man's ruling that it shall *remain wasted*. It is my belief that only some great calamity to the manhood of Europe that will of necessity bring woman forward as the *provider* both of men-children and the means to sustain them, only some great upheaval of that nature will work the miracle for which the women of Europe have been praying—not only praying, but fighting."

"The militant certainly embodies the great feminine '*I need*' carried to the point of dementia."

"It is that—exactly. . . . It is fortunate for us that, our need being less importunate, we will be content to alter gradually the mental attitudes of men and women."

"We have a long way to travel before we shall see any essential change in man's viewpoint," Myra said. She wore the look Miss Wentworth had occasionally detected when her partner was off guard.

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice studied her keenly. "What has come over you?" she asked. "I left you softly smiling—like any girl—withdrawn within yourself, and shy of the world, and here I am met by a tall woman with an inscrutable face who has the business of a firm on her shoulders, and in addition is eager to have part in every interest woman has manufactured for herself. I have been back but a few days, still the little birds have whispered things to me—they have told me about your activities. You remind me now of myself. What has come over you, my dear?" Her question was anxious. "That Alyth man?" she asked herself.

Myra smiled, a smile of the lips only. "Suppose you explain me by yourself."

"You are hunting distraction?"

"No. . . . It is not that I want to be so busy that I have no time to think. If one has a brain one will think—

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in spite of everything. . . . It's simply that I must fight—for something—anything—provided it makes me struggle. I want to keep alive the power to go on. If I relaxed I should be lost."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice hesitated as she had more than once before. Then she took her courage in both hands. "My little friend, you must forgive me, but I have feared it for a long time—you and George Alyth love each other . . . and now, he being what he is, and you being the woman you are, you have come to the inevitable deadlock. . . . Isn't it so?"

The flush that dyed Myra crimson was a painful thing even to see. She looked down.

"The dear Lord!" Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice sighed. And after a long pause, "But is it so hopeless?"

"Yes."

"But there is always the long future—"

Myra was silent.

"There is something you fear, then?"

"Yes," Myra said, her face still averted. "I am afraid of myself—and I am in torment over him. I know, just as I did on the night that we parted, that the situation lies in my hands. I could not bring myself to take the lesser thing when I knew it would mean the destruction of all that was beautiful—between him and me. I want all of him, his respect as well as his love. . . . But there's the temptation always with me. I know so well—a message and he would come—and sometimes the longing is almost too much for me." She raised eyes whose pupils were so dilated that they looked black. "It sha'n't rule me—the thing that's mostly passion. That's why I am struggling. . . . But I cannot help thinking, how will it be with him? A man with a man's freedom and his temptations. He is fighting against the lesser thing, and for the same reason that I will not allow myself to tempt him—but with some one of the many others that will

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be sure to have their appeal . . . how will it be? . . . I think I should *kill* her!" She was primitive enough as she drew herself up, her body taut, her eyes ablaze with jealousy over the visions of her own conjuring.

"Myra!"

"Does the truth horrify you—you who are always investigating the psychology of those about you?" Myra demanded, bitterly. "Men and women are not so different as one might suppose; it's merely that men have been more honest in their confessions than women, so we know more about them."

"But, my dear, you are in such—danger! . . . And I have grown to love you a little as I would were you my daughter. The good Lord never gave me a child. . . . Oh, these women of to-day who analyze themselves so accurately, and yet are Eve all over again—just Eve!" Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice was quite unstrung; for the first time in all Myra's knowledge of her she saw tears in her friend's eyes.

"Don't worry about me, dear," Myra said, with a change to gentleness. "I am not in half as much danger as the woman who did not know enough to analyze herself, and so did not know how to take herself in hand. She either ate her heart out, or did away with herself, or, not knowing what prompted her, turned to some other man—or, worst of all, tempted the man she loved to the lesser thing. . . . You asked me what had come over me, and I simply told you the truth—I am putting up a fight against myself."

"It is an awful muddle. I hoped it might never be. . . . What will you do, my dear?"

"Do? . . . What I am doing—work."

"But you will come to me often? Promise me that you will, and that you will talk as you feel. You would never have spoken out if it did not ease you to do so. . . . It is true—women have always erected barriers between them-



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selves—they are not honest with one another—that's why they have been of so little assistance to each other. . . . And some time I will tell you a few things about myself. I also had to put up a fight against myself—oh, a long time ago, when I was as young as you—but I bear the marks of it yet. . . . Promise me?"

Myra promised.

But Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's anxiety would not let her rest. It took her to Karl Janniss. She came into his studio one day, smiling brightly, and jauntily demanded tea. "Brew me a decent cup," she begged. "I have been drinking the black infusion the English call tea until I am the color of ink—all inside."

Janniss shook her by both hands, genuinely glad to see her. "Well! I'm *honored!*" he exclaimed. "When did you get back?"

"Only a few days ago." And while Janniss cleared the divan and drew up his tea-table, and they chatted gaily, she looked about her. Against the wall was the portrait of the man about whom she had come to inquire. But she did not introduce the subject at once. "Who are you doing now?" she asked.

"Senator Bermann—there he is on the easel—that's going to hang in his new house in Washington. I'd like to paint President Wilson, too."

"Of course—ambition incarnate!"

"Well, I've got to make good, you know," Janniss said, with a flush and a squaring of his shoulders. "It is the real thing this time, Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice. You've heard what has happened to me while you've been away, haven't you?"

"Is she like Myra, *mon ami?*"

"She's like no one but just herself," Janniss declared, warmly. "I'll let you see her—there are mighty few to whom I allow the privilege." And he brought from his

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bedroom a dainty painting of Ina, a little thing beautifully done. "There's my little brown girl."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice took keen note of the clear eyes and intelligent brow. "She has a fine face—you are fortunate."

"Don't I know that! She's just that—fine clear through!"

"Be sure you make her happy."

"I'll try," Janniss said, deeply. "I'm a blundering sort, but she'll show me how. . . . We're going to be a sensible couple. You are broad-minded, so you'll understand when I say that the agreement we are going to enter into, the thing that's between ourselves, is going to be the important thing. We are going to try out marriage, find out whether we are really meant for each other first of all, and if we are not, we are going to part friends, and the law will help us to do it. . . . When we know that much about each other, we want children."

"I suppose it's the most sensible procedure—at the present stage," Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice said, gravely. Then she underwent one of her quick changes, the imp of mischief livening her small features. "And the portrait you paint of your wife will, I suppose, be your masterpiece?"

Janniss flamed scarlet. "I—put my wife on canvas for every one to stare at! . . . Heavens no!"

"Excuse me," Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice apologized, meekly.

"Oh, that's all right!" Janniss said in some embarrassment over his heat. "It's usual, I know, only it would never occur to me to do it."

"I think probably you are really in love," Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice remarked, and then she added, with genuine feeling: "You two young people will be happy. The greatest danger in marriage is the growing apart of husband and wife. You will not do that. She

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has an honest eye, that little girl of yours. Give her honesty for honesty, and all will go well. . . . And now tell me—the portrait of that Alyth man I see over there—when did you do that?”

“Last winter. He has been giving me some sittings lately; it’s practically finished.”

“It’s as masterly a piece of work as you have ever done,” she said, thoughtfully.

Her criticism was just. Clean, forceful, and yet suggestive of the mystery that always surrounds a subtle delineation of character. Janniss had shown wonderfully the secretive man, the man of impenetrable reserve, and at the same time revealed the fire that always lay deep in Alyth’s eyes. An all-pervading *capability*, reserve, imagination—it *was* Alyth.

But the whole was overlaid by an expression that at first was puzzling, and Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice’s keenly critical faculty put it into words: “He wears—the hard look of—I don’t know just what . . . impatience, determination, disgust—no, all three combined?”

“You have it!” Janniss exclaimed. “That expression has come to the surface in the last sittings—and because it’s Alyth—as he is, these days.” He had sprung up in his interest, and was standing before his work, his hands in his pockets. “It’s those recent lines about his mouth. I’d like to paint them out. A man makes his mouth—more than any other feature. . . . Alyth’s curious—”

“Where does he live?”

“He has a bachelor apartment—somewhere out in your direction.”

“But I thought he was married—”

“Oh yes, but he’s cut loose—lately.”

“You mean he has taken up with some woman?” Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice asked, briskly. Better a bald question than one that could be evaded.

Janniss was quick to shield the other man. To a small



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extent he was in Alyth's confidence. "I didn't mean to give that impression! Alyth's all right!" he said, positively. "He's perfectly straight, and a mighty clever man. If he wants it to *appear* that he has gone on the loose for the time being, he probably has the best of reasons for it."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's eyes twinkled. She had instantly caught Janniss's meaning. She was greatly relieved. George Alyth was clever; he would know how best to handle his matrimonial affairs. . . . But it might be well to discover how much Janniss was in his confidence.

"I suppose it is the usual thing—he has found some one he loves and means to marry her?" she asked, abruptly.

Janniss was annoyed. "How like a woman!" he thought. "As soon as she succeeds in extracting a bit of information, she jumps to conclusions that are not warranted." His answer was a trifle curt. "I don't think so. Alyth may want his wife to divorce him, but I've seen no indications of his being in love with any one."

Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice was secretly amused. Janniss evidently had no suspicion of the truth. He was a dear, lovable man and a genius, but he was not acute in some respects. And he was something of a blunderer, so there might be danger to Myra in all this; a jealous woman is not, as a rule, reasonable.

"I hope that you will not mention the matter to Myra," she said.

"Why?" Janniss asked, surprised.

"Because Myra has always had such a high opinion of Alyth. It is so easy to put a wrong construction on such proceedings. Myra is not likely to hear of Alyth's doings from any one but you."

"I'm no scandal-monger!" Janniss said, with some warmth. "I shouldn't have told you—if you hadn't surprised it from me."

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"I know you are not—and also that you are a good friend to Myra St. Claire. You know how loyal she is to any one she likes; it would hurt her to feel that Alyth was laying himself open to criticism. Myra has much responsibility and worryment to contend with just now. Let us be considerate and guard her from disagreeable things."

"She doesn't seem herself," Janniss agreed. "I don't know what has come over her."

After Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had gone, and Janniss had cursed himself for being a chattering idiot, he gave some anxious consideration to Myra. She was not herself—not the Myra he had known. The winter before she used to speak of her little apartment with real affection as "home." She seemed quite indifferent to this new place she had made so beautiful. It was her attitude to everything—a certain lack of interest. She worked very hard, she was indefatigable, yet to Janniss that activity of hers seemed no real part of herself.

Janniss had for Myra the genuine interest that every man who has emerged from an infatuation with respect intact feels for the woman who once engrossed him. The change in her had worried him. She did not appear ill as she had in the summer, but it was quite evident that she was not happy. And yet she had been successful in asserting her independence. Janniss had puzzled over her, and decided that Myra, like every one else, wanted love; that was the great lack. She was simply making the best of life without it. He was very sorry for her. He felt as Ina did, that life had gone all wrong with her. She ought not to be alone. She needed some one to watch over her. Janniss was still sensitive over the criticism he had once brought upon Myra.

And in thinking matters over he took exception to Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice's ruling. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice was quite right when she said that Myra was not likely to

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hear of a man's doings, even as well-known a man as George Alyth; but evidently it had not occurred to her that it would be a mistake for Myra to be seen with Alyth just now, or to receive him at her home. Alyth would probably avoid it, and yet, if he was in the habit of seeing Myra, it might not occur to him. It was a thing he could not mention to Alyth. Better Myra should have a warning than be subjected to some one of the many embarrassments that might grow out of ignorance. . . . And Myra was inclined to be unconventional. She had a large contempt for the usual narrow-minded view that tended to bring strictures upon herself; she needed some one to guard her.

Janniss's conclusions took him to Myra that evening. He had no liking for his undertaking; it seemed like tattling on another man. He was decided upon one point: he would not disclose Alyth's purpose; he had no right to do it. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had trapped him into admissions against which he meant to guard himself. He must simply impress upon Myra the necessity of being careful. It would do her no good to be commented upon in connection with Alyth.

Janniss was a little comic in his discomfort and his pre-occupation, so much so that Myra finally asked:

"What is on thy mind? Has Ina decided not to be married this spring?"

Though Myra smiled, her eyes were tired, for she was tired in spirit. Her talk with Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice had left her heart-sick, and it was a little hard to listen to the happiness of others with an ache in her own heart. She looked so worn and heavy-eyed that Janniss had insisted on making her comfortable on the couch. He had bolstered her with pillows and had turned down the lights. He felt that he was the harbinger of ill news; Myra was a loyal friend; he knew she liked Alyth. It was a disagreeable situation.



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"It's not my affairs this time," he said, summoning determination. "It's yours—or, rather, Alyth's affair."

With a slow motion that by no chance could be called nervous Myra had been playing with the silk tassel of a pillow. Her hand suddenly closed on it. She turned stiffly and looked at Janniss.

"Alyth's—affair—?"

"Yes. . . . I know you like him—I suppose he comes here sometimes—so I feel I ought to tell you; Alyth has been laying himself open to criticism lately—the public is always so determined to take the worst view—"

"What do you mean?" Myra asked, with a touch of sharpness.

"You know Cecile Jerome, the actress? Alyth is with her a good deal these days, and though there is nothing out of the way about their intimacy—Cecile has dozens of men friends—still, Cecile being what she is, there's talk. Alyth's perfectly straight; Alyth is all right. I'd answer for Alyth under any circumstances. He's not a man who'd allow a woman to dominate him. It's simply—well, just a friendship with an unconventional woman that doesn't do a man a particle of harm."

Myra was silent.

"You see," Janniss continued, somewhat confusedly, "I don't know if you know it, but Alyth has separated from his wife lately. Some one told me that in the autumn he lost one of his children, and through some accident for which his wife was responsible—that the thing maddened him—one hears all sorts of tales; but it is certainly true that he has severed all connection with his wife, walked out of their house, and has never gone back to it. Of course that in itself is enough to make talk, and people who don't know Alyth as we do are certain to put a wrong construction upon his friendship with a woman like Cecile. I assure you that Alyth is all right. Next month he may be off to Central Africa or the Himalayas,

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and in time come back with the thing forgotten—that's the sort of thing a man can do—but just now there is talk. Better for you to keep out of it. Any woman who is seen with Alyth just now will be commented on."

"How—long—has this been going on?" Myra asked in level tones.

"Oh, since some time in January. It took a little time for people to catch on."

"She is attractive; I have seen her act," Myra said in the same quiet way. She looked down at the hand that lay on the pillow, a white patch in the dimness.

"Attractive, yes—she's been responsible for a deal of mischief; but, as I said, she's not the kind of woman to take hold on a man like Alyth. . . . Still there's a nice side to Cecile. I discovered that when I painted her. She's foreign—half French, half Bohemian. Some man took her when she was a mere child, and when he found she had talent was decent enough to give her an education. She's supported a worthless father and mother, to say nothing of half a dozen brothers and sisters, ever since. She is a loyal soul, for all her loose living. She was quite frank with me about herself; she considers that her art excuses everything—she is above rules. She is not a great actress, though, only a clever one, as everybody knows, and I believe Forman was right when he said that but for her absorption in men she would have been a wonderful actress. . . . Still, as I say, there is a nice side to her—some really fine qualities."

"It would have to be so with him."

"I hated to come tattling, Myra, but I felt you ought to know. It will all come out right in the end; but just now—well, it wouldn't do for you to let him come here—for instance."

"He is not likely to come here—unless I ask him. You need not worry; he is not a frequent visitor."

She impressed Janniss as coldly withdrawn; so much so

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as to appear indifferent. And it was as well so. The thing would be explained in time. He hastened to drop the subject. He was greatly relieved to have it over.

"Shall I clear out now?" he asked. "You are tired. It's good of you to see me at all. I am afraid I'm generally a bore, still you are always patient with me."

"You belong to me—in a way," Myra answered, steadily. "One of the few of my possessions that is genuine. . . . But I am tired to-night."

"I know you are. I'll go. . . . Don't get up. Shall I turn the lights out altogether?" He asked because Myra had shaded her face with her hand.

"Yes, please."

When he was gone Myra raised herself gradually, then stood up. She went to one light after the other and turned it on, moving slowly and stiffly. She went into the hall then and closed the doors that led to the servants' rooms, and drew the draperies. At any moment, when the thing that was tearing at her tortured her too greatly for self-control, she would have to cry aloud. . . . She stood then a moment and looked about her. . . . A strange house without any reminders of him except the tall, twisted Venetian vase on the mantel-shelf that used to hold his daily offering of roses. He had brought it to her when he had returned from the dead—a wonder several centuries old. She remembered his look and his caress when he had presented it to her. She had left the little apartment that was full of reminders of him because it weakened her will. For a time she had hidden even this token of his love. But the desire had finally been too much for her, and she had put the vase where she could see it frequently.

Myra went to it now in the same slow way, and, taking it up in both hands, looked at it. . . . She had just listened to a man's usual condoning of another man's fault. . . . And Alyth, the man whose very name she loved, after



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all there had been between them, was giving of himself to another. . . . The upward sweep of agony raised the fragile thing high above her head, and then with all the force that lay in her Myra dashed it to the hearth, and at the sound of its breaking the wild man that lies in us all broke loose.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

SOME time in the small hours Myra lifted her head and listened. Bruised, disheveled, the blood that congested her eyes blinding her, she tried to see whence came the persistent, insistent annoyance—a shrill ringing that to her numb ears was like the continued buzzing of a huge insect. Myra put back her hair and listened. . . . It was the telephone in the next room.

She was at the foot of the couch; she had slipped from it to the floor. She had clutched and dragged at everything within reach; she lay in the midst of confusion. . . . They would tire of calling after a time. . . . Myra dropped back into the long-drawn breaths, each a moan, with which she was slowly returning to reason. In a disjointed way thought was obtruding itself. Her fury of jealousy was crystallizing into determination. Before twenty-four hours passed that woman should be to Alyth a thing forgotten. She knew the appeal that would bring him to her, and her power to keep him when he came. . . . But she must be controlled if she was to act effectively. She had gone quite mad—he must never know that. . . . If only that noise in the next room would stop—she could not think with the blur of it in her ears.

But it did not stop, and with merely the reassertion of habit, without any interest, Myra dragged herself up. If she quieted the thing she would be left alone. But her feet refused to serve her at first, she had been lying on the hard floor so long; all the blood in her body seemed to be in her head, in her eyes. . . . It occurred to her

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vaguely that she was paralyzed. That would be a calamity. . . . Myra sat on the edge of the couch and, bending over, rubbed her feet. The ringing had ceased abruptly.

But in a few moments it began again and continued, steadily, and Myra got up and groped her way to it through a brightly lighted room. When she opened her bedroom door it shrieked at her. Her "Yes" was merely an inarticulate sound; she had to make another effort.

"Hello! Hello. Is there some one there? . . . *Don't ring off!*" a man's voice shouted at her. "Hello! Is this Mrs. St. Claire's residence?"

"Yes—" Myra could formulate the word now.

"Is this Mrs. St. Claire?"

"Yes."

"This is the Waldorf. Your father is here. He has been taken ill. He wants you—"

"Yes—" Myra's brain was not working yet, except over the one idea: the determination to bring Alyth to her. She was numb to every other interest; incapable of anything but the husky reiteration.

The man's voice had a note of exasperation. "Your father, Mr. Milenberg, is *here*. He has been taken very ill. We've been trying to get you, and couldn't raise any one. We've sent a taxi out for you; it ought to be there by now."

"My father is very ill?" Her consciousness was pierced at last.

"Yes. The doctor says not to lose a moment. He may be dying!" The voice flung it at her as if utterly exasperated that its owner could not lay hands on her, and so shake her out of sleep.

"I understand now—my father is at the Waldorf—he has been taken dangerously ill."

"That's it. 'Don't stop for anything, but come'—that's his message. Our taxi ought to be there by now."

"I will come—at once."



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Myra hung the receiver up and rose. Her father was ill—dying—she must go to him at once. It was another idea, an urgent thing thrust upon her—something that must be done first of all. . . . Myra put her hands to her head. . . . She must go down to the taxicab.

It had come, for they were rapping at her door, the butler, and behind him his wife, the cook. The door-bell rang in their quarters; they had been more easy to rouse than she. In the hall stood a man in the Waldorf uniform.

While Myra gathered up her hair with shaking hands, trying to put pins in it, they brought her long cloak and her hat and veil. The filmy lace at the sleeves and neck of her tea-gown hung in tatters, and the butler looked curiously at it and at her livid face. His wife was confused and useless, but he was cool. He had glanced into the brilliantly lighted drawing-room and seen the havoc, chairs thrust aside, some of them overturned, the vase shattered on the hearth, the couch in disarray! Their rooms were above, and at the rear of the duplex apartment; they had heard nothing. What in Heaven's name had been happening while they slept?

"Your lip is cut, madame," he suggested, proffering a wet towel.

Myra pressed its coolness to her swollen mouth. When she took it away it was stained. "My hand-bag—on the dresser, there!" she said. "Put some handkerchiefs in it." And while they did what she ordered Myra held the wet towel to her bruised and burning wrists. Her faculties were returning to her. . . . Was her father in actual danger?

The man from the Waldorf told her a little as he took her down to the cab. James Milenberg had come in on the late train, apparently feeling as well as usual. But he had not been in his room an hour before he had aroused the office. They had done their best, summoned their

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physician, and he in his turn had called a specialist. It was appendicitis, a very bad attack; her father was in grave danger.

"He must be in pain," Myra said in a voice that was still dull.

The man drew a quick breath. "I hope I'll never see the like again. . . . Mr. Milenberg gave your address clear enough, though," he added, admiringly. "He has nerve—James Milenberg has." They knew Milenberg well at the Waldorf; he always stopped there.

It was a very dark night. Patches of snow dimly white against the black pavement raced by them. When they turned into Fifth Avenue they went haltingly for a few blocks; something had gone wrong with their engine. The man was outside with the driver, so Myra was alone, and when they stopped for an impatient moment she noticed in an extraneous way that the Avenue wore the clean-swept aspect of three o'clock in the morning, the shops guarding it like sentinels asleep at their posts. An unshuttered window stared at her with the blank orbs of a sleep-walker, dully glazed, and only faintly revealing shrouded forms, arrays of pale ghosts, thoughts hypnotized.

There had come over Myra the sense of unreality that usually follows upon hours of emotional tensivity. Her first feverish thoughts, the promptings of fury and jealousy, were dulled. She had more the feeling that something annihilating had happened to her. She felt heavy, numbly hurt. It did not seem strange or startling that her father was in extremity; the whole world seemed wrapped in a fog of pain. She was being hurried to her father, and yet she felt no great impatience over the few moments' stop. She was extraordinarily tired.

Myra's first really normal thought was when she was ushered into the atmosphere of intolerable suffering; of haste, of rapid decision, and quick action. They had decided to operate at once; that the usual rushing of the

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patient to the hospital was out of the question. Preparations were already under way; a white-clad nurse was at the telephone giving orders, and two tall men, the doctors, were moving swiftly about the room. Hotel attendants padded in and out, fetching and carrying, running when they went out into the corridor.

It was the thought of her mother that came suddenly to Myra, and because of the love that lay between them she was jerked abruptly away from thoughts of herself. This would be a fearful thing for her mother! It was her father's face with its twitching muscles and hot eyes that shocked her into complete reality.

Myra knelt that she might hear better, and his small, wiry hand that had been clutching the bedding closed then on her bruised wrist.

"Listen!" he said. "I've got—only a few minutes—before they'll handle me like any dead beef. . . . Send for your mother. Get her here as soon as you can. I *want* her. Do you hear? Tell her I *want* her. . . . Everything's in order. Scott has my papers—he drew up my will. You've got the only business head in the family—you consult with him. . . . He'll tell you about St. Claire. Scott's the only one—besides Nathan Kodis—who knows what's afoot. It's not been my doing. Justin's been . . . a *fool*. . . ."

He muttered and gasped, his shoulders twisting against the pillow, and because he was passing into a delirium of pain he looked at his daughter vaguely. "So—you've come—at last, Myra?"

Myra took the hand that had dropped hers, and put her cheek against it. "Yes, father. I have thought of mother—I will send for her at once. I'll do whatever you want done—"

Milenberg steadied himself with a tremendous effort for the reiteration of the two ideas uppermost in his mind. "That's it. You get your mother here—so you can look after her. Tell her to bring Ina. . . . She's a good woman,



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your mother. She's always done the best—she knew. But, *Myra*, it's you'll have to look after the family now. There's Eustace; he's irresponsible: you'll have to look after him like a baby. Lord! if I had a *son*—who could carry things on!" He rolled his head distressfully on the pillow, muttering words *Myra* barely caught. "You're a comfort to me—after all. . . . The man who wants—big money—he's got to rule. . . . It's either eat—or be—eaten—with him. . . . But a man's down—and out—awful quick. . . ."

*Myra* felt the doctor's hand on her arm, lifting her, moving her aside. "We must give an opiate now," he said.

*Milenberg* heard and, turning his head, looked at them, his brain suddenly grown clear, his eyes steel-pointed. "So you're going to take away my wits, are you?" he demanded, sharply. "Can't you do it without that? I'll stand for it."

In his piercing look, keen despite the agony that was twisting him, lay the dread of the man who for a lifetime had relied on his wits to fight the great battle. He had owned to no will but his own; relied on no one. His reliance had been upon the power he had won, and here he lay, helpless as any tortured child.

The doctor shook his head decidedly. "I'm afraid not, Mr. *Milenberg*."

*Milenberg* eyed him a moment, not shrinkingly, with a look of defiance, rather, commingled with bewilderment. Then he gathered himself together. "Very well," he said, decidedly. "If it's got to be, it's go to be. . . . *Myra*, remember what I've told you—be good to your mother. She's stood by me for thirty years or so. We belong to each other by rights—she ought to be in at the finish. . . . Go ahead, doctor—" And he turned his face from them.

*Myra* did her father's bidding, the difficult task of conveying over the telephone urgency, but not terror. There

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followed then the time of waiting—until science accomplished its work.

Myra sat alone, the window-shade raised high, her eyes on a strip of opaque sky shot with the angry glow of the city. She sat alone until it began to gray, and in that space she learned what Alyth had meant when he said, "It's simply that for the first time in my life I have faced myself, the man I am fundamentally." Myra was facing herself, the woman she was fundamentally and the woman she had builded, and like the anger-hued black in the strip of sky above her, rage and jealousy, self-will and self-seeking, the hot, demanding woman in her, grayed into a better understanding.

Fundamentally she was very like the suffering man in the next room, who was steeped now in unconsciousness; reliant always upon her own will, impatient of law, ready to make her own law, bid defiance to the decisions of generations of law-builders—determined, *self-centered*. Therein lay the fault in her building—she had built after a fashion that had cemented those qualities; she had moved in, and about, and for herself—*always*.

Myra went far back into her childhood. Was there any one to whom she had given love, or loving thought, but her mother? And that reflected no great credit upon herself—what child would not treat tenderly such devotion as her mother's? Hers had been a hardening girlhood, rasped raw by impatience, critical, saved from callousness only because she had succeeded in treasuring an ideal. She had been bitter in her judgments of the father whose voice she might never hear again, and tolerantly loving of the mother who had yearned over her. Even her ideal, her worship of truth, commingled as it was with the intense desire to be loved, was tinged with devotion to self. One might yearn to build life, but the yearning lacked the real vivifying principle if not hand-clasped with the humble sisters, Faith, Hope, Charity, and Self-

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sacrifice. In all her life who had she helped? Over whom had she expended herself? How else but arrogantly had she borne herself? . . . She had not built well. If she meant to weave her life into the Great Future, step up and not down, she must build differently.

Slowly and painfully Myra put together the pieces drawn one by one from out her scrap-bag of experiences. In her utter desolation, with the consciousness that to her there was only "retrospect left," she wove them, as she had long ago said to Alyth, into the pattern of her "patchwork quilt." Next the "bitter black" of her disappointing marriage she placed the "hot red" of her passionate desire for Alyth; for it had been that with her, as it had been with him. Not that alone, thank God! not that alone! But a love belittled, well-nigh destroyed, by it. The purely animal craving that had set her to moaning and beating about like any mad creature appalled her. In intention she had *killed* a dozen times; and even when returned to reason she had planned to subjugate the man she desired, as would any abandoned woman. . . . It was horrible! . . . To the end of her life she would redden with shame over that revelation of herself.

She had been saved from remaining in the dust of the gray road and groveling in it by a call to duty. Her father had needed her; they all needed her. Her mother's passionate setting forth of duty recurred to Myra, and also Alyth's face of white determination when he had said, "Every one of us is linked to the long chain of mutual responsibility, a bondage that is for our own good." . . . Others had suffered as tremendous a hurt as she. Myra thought of the two women she knew best. What had her mother done when life had dealt her a blow? Turned to duty, wrapped herself in her children, to the best of her ability lived in and for them. And Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice? Myra knew that there was some tragic disappointment beneath all that restless activity of hers. Myra had



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learned, and not from Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, the numbers whom her little white-haired friend's money and interest helped. No woman in need ever appealed to her in vain. In her business experience was she not constantly stumbling upon the man or woman who held to life because of responsibility to others?

Myra had taken them one by one and stitched them into place, her collection of experiences—until she came to the last. To look at it, touch it, caused her exquisite pain; the man she loved had stumbled and fallen into the dust of the gray road, and the hurt she would carry through life was the realization that the love she had aroused in him was not such as to make impossible the thing that had happened. . . . And the blame was partly hers. She had received such as she had given—an imperfect love. A great love is incapable of jealousy and hatred. It does not falter or turn aside. They had failed to reach the heights; they had failed in friendship to each other . . . . The realization would come to him as it had to her. He would gather himself up out of the dust, just as she had—she *knew* it. Then there might be possible to them a love that would surmount desire; that would not fear contact; that could forego and yet be content.

When the tinge of gray began to pale the lights in the room the doctor came to her. He answered briefly the question her eyes asked. He looked a little haggard in the mingled light.

"We found a bad state of things. A little longer and it would have been too late. He is doing as well as we could expect, but what the future 'll bring is impossible to predict." He looked curiously at her then, arrested by her deadly pallor and swollen lips. "You have had an accident?" he asked. He was a kindly spoken man, one of the city's greatest surgeons.

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"I cut my lip on glass."

"I'll give you something for it. . . . See then if you can rest. There is nothing you can do—I shall be here most of the day; but when the news of this gets about your hands will be full. And it's just as well so. I've found in my experience that there's no aid in trouble like a duty right at hand. Your mother will be here to-night; you must think of her. The last word your father said to us was that he 'relied' on you."

He gave her the reminder purposely. She looked so ghastly, as one might look when brought from a torture-chamber.

The first tears Myra had shed welled in her eyes. "I will do my best."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN the days that followed Myra did do her best.

Mrs. Milenberg came that night, white-faced, but with her faded eyes grown luminous. It seemed to Myra that her mother had suddenly gained in stature, that her shoulders were less rounded, her head more erect. Her daughters stood on the threshold, watching her go to their father as directly as a bird flies, and when his feeble hand gropingly found her white head that was bent to his breast, they could guess at his whisper from her answer:

"Yes, I knew you would want me, dear."

And again the whisper that reached her ear alone, but that the deep note of her reply made distinct enough to their understanding: "But I took you for better or for worse, James. I've been the best friend you've ever had—"

They closed the door then, leaving the two together, and their arms went about each other. It was Ina who wept: "Who would have thought—it would come about like that—Myra? . . . Oh, I *pray* father will live! . . . He *must* live. . . ."

With feelings too deep for speech Myra kissed her sister. It was truth itself, that old conviction of hers, that only a love cemented in by friendship can weather the storms of life. "A friend loveth at all times, and is a brother born for adversity." She was being taught the great truth anew.

Myra gave Ina over to Janniss's comforting arms and turned to the work at hand. The doctor was right when



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he had said that Myra would have her hands full. The complication he feared had set in, and all the world knew now that James Milenberg's life hung by a thread. Myra learned then how innumerable had been her father's interests. Telegrams, messages, poured in. Milenberg's lawyer, Scott, came from Chicago, and it was Myra who was closeted with him. Because she had forgotten about herself, her father's mention of St. Claire had passed from her mind, and, true to his lawyer's creed, Scott volunteered no unnecessary information; there were a hundred other things that related more closely to his client's affairs that must be discussed. Janniss had come promptly, and had relieved Myra of much. Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice also came. Her active assistance was for any one who needed it; but Myra was her particular charge, so she had a word for Myra's ear alone.

"My dear," she said, with a cheerful disregard of the possibility that Myra might be as well informed as she, "some one told me last night, as we were watching Cecile Jerome in her new play, that George Alyth had left for Europe a few days ago. Were he here he would be a right hand to you in all this trouble. As it is, he knows nothing about it, of course."

A speech delivered apparently entirely without a double meaning, but one that brought the color to Myra's pale cheeks and a tremor to her hands. . . . He had gathered himself up, then, out of the dust of the gray road, and was going on? She had known that he would. Myra had no answer at all for Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice, but the comfort of that speech entered into her as her little friend meant it should, and helped her when she was nearly fainting with anxiety and weariness.

It was not until the fifth day that Myra was able to go to her office to make arrangements with Miss Wentworth. She must be relieved of business cares for a time at least. If her father died she must give herself to her mother,

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and even if he lived, of which there seemed no hope, she would be needed. Then she went to her apartment, the first time she had entered it since the night of her being hurried away.

She was given little time to reflect on that night of misery. "There is a lady waiting to see you, madame," the butler announced, when she came in. "She said it was a matter of the greatest importance, and as you had sent word you would be here, I permitted her to stay."

"Who is it?" Myra asked.

"I will get her card, madame."

But Myra did not wait for it. She went on into the drawing-room, her first glance for the spot where she had intentionally destroyed a beautiful thing. Myra reddened dully at the remembrance. How could she have done it! The hearth was swept clean of the bits of glass. The sunshine rested on the trim couch, and on the woman who rose to meet her. . . . It was Harriet Swift.

It struck Myra, together with her surprise, that the woman's face wore the white look of strained anxiety that was the expression with which she had become most familiar in the last few days—the same expression that was stamped upon her own features. Myra had become a woman of few words during that time of stress, so her greeting was simple:

"I didn't expect to see you. They told me it was something important?" They clasped hands as they had when parting at Acton Place.

"It's a matter of life and death, or I wouldn't have intruded when you are in trouble," Mrs. Swift answered. "I came to New York yesterday. I have been so pre-occupied that I didn't happen to see the notices in the papers. It was Frank Hipbard who told me this morning."

She spoke in the same collected way Myra remembered so well; quite calmly in spite of her look of strain and

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anxiety. She was very pale, the shadows dark under her cold eyes. She looked aged, the skin about her mouth drawn, and her lips colorless. Yet there was still the air of magnificence about her—a certain statuesque amplitude.

"It is all a matter of life and death these days," Myra returned. "I am sorry if you also are in trouble." She took off her hat as she spoke, mechanically, merely because of the consciousness that she was very tired. She knew in a vague way that Mrs. Swift had come from St. Claire, and in the same vague way she realized that she had always known that sooner or later St. Claire would be in difficulties, and that his difficulties would be brought to her. But this was a curious messenger to choose.

"You haven't heard, then?" Mrs. Swift said. "I thought possibly your father might have told you."

Myra was struck afresh by the woman's strained look and level tones. She studied her more intently. "No, father has not told me—he has been too ill. . . . What is it?"

"Justin is ruined—worse than ruined."

Myra's eyes widened at the sudden deep note of despair. "I have always suspected that Justin was in money difficulties—that that was one reason he married me. . . . What do you mean by 'worse than ruined'?"

"It's not just that he's ruined—plenty of men survive that. He's *disgraced*."

For the first time since she had left her husband Myra had the feeling that he was a part of her. The ugly word that must sear him touched her. She flushed. You mean—?"

"That he has used funds intrusted to him. It's a long story—"

A suspicion that for a long time had lain unformulated in Myra's mind sprang into words. "Not Adele Courland's money?"



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"Yes." Mrs. Swift's voice faltered on the admission. "Hers and others', but I didn't know it. . . . It's—a long story—"

"Let us sit down," Myra interrupted, huskily. "You are not fit to stand. . . . Now tell me—"

"Justin never ought to have speculated," Mrs. Swift said. "That's the way his wife's money went—most of it. That was back in the early days when I first knew him. He had the management of his wife's money during those years when she was irresponsible, and it was a long course of taking from Peter to pay Paul, keeping the estate in the dark. The thing was done before I knew Justin; the best I could do was to help him keep out of trouble. If she had not left her money to him unconditionally, exposure would have come when she died. All those years Justin had the possibility hanging over him, hell enough for any man, and a sufficient object-lesson, one would suppose, but Justin had the 'big money' idea in the marrow of him. I tried to keep him to his practice. He had a good conservative practice, and during the three years when he was doing government work—when he was in Europe and the Philippines—he had a big salary. But after his wife died, and he knew he was safe, he got restless. He had taken up his practice again in St. Louis. He had a huge practice then, and the management of several estates. But he had cultivated the moneyed crowd, and he wanted to travel with them. It drove him frantic that he couldn't make a fortune at a leap. He was supposed to have his wife's money. He got a lot of credit he didn't deserve from the conservative because he didn't gamble with big sums, as the rest did. It made people trust him who otherwise might have been skeptical. He had plenty of other people's money to handle, mostly women's money, for he was considered so safe.

"Then he met you, and he thought he saw his way clear

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to do great things. He could be of use to your father, for your father was trying to get the best of the government, and in payment he expected to make a fortune in some of your father's big undertakings. He was carried away by what he thought was an extraordinary opportunity. . . . But he ran a big risk. He didn't play fair, for he let your father think, together with everybody else, that he had a deal more money back of him than he had. . . . And what could I do? Raise a scandal, tell on him?" She lifted her hands and dropped them, an expression of utter futility. "I simply had to knuckle under—there was my little girl to consider. I've always had her to consider. I'd learned in those four years during which Justin was free to marry me that he would never do it. He is not the kind of man who marries his mistress. . . . He thought it safest for me to go to Paris. I went. I knew perfectly well that he would want me back. I knew he would do foolish things.

"His first folly was Woodmansie Place. Then he put what money he had left on some of your father's ventures. That was all right enough; there is no shrewder investor in this country than your father; but Justin was having to do now with men who had millions to back them. They could hold out any length of time, or follow a policy that would wipe out the less fortunate investors. Having that money of Adele's that he could use was a bad thing. When the directors of the U. M. M. tied up its dividends for three years, Justin fell back on Adele's money. . . . Adele came from Paris then. She wasn't thinking of her money; she's a poor thing with a lopsided brain; it was simply that she had been mad over Justin for years, and she was furious that he had married you. She meant to make trouble between you if she could.

"Well, Justin had speculated on the side with most of Adele's money, and done no better with it than he had with his wife's. He was terribly excited and worried.

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He couldn't afford to break with Adele. He sent for me then, but he didn't tell me he had used Adele's money, only that he was tied up tight. I thought that his combination with your father wasn't doing him any good. I hoped you'd break with Justin—for more reasons than one—I seemed to be the only person who was fitted to take care of him. And it might all end in his marrying me. But if I'd known at the time just how things were, I would never have owned to the truth of that letter—I wouldn't have *dared*.

"Your break with Justin was the beginning of the end. Your father grew cautious, and to ward off suspicion Justin had to appear to have plenty of ready money. He had to furnish Adele and others with their incomes. He began to use other money he had in trust. He worked out a system of false vouchers, bogus deeds—I don't know what all. Oh, the whole thing was *bad*, just as *bad* as it could be! I think Justin has been *insane*—it's the only plea that can be made for him to the grand jury."

"And it has come to that?" Myra asked in a low voice.

"Yes," Mrs. Swift said, haggardly. "Yes. . . . Justin has had an enemy all these years. Some ten years ago he took a man named Nathan Kodis into his office. The man was clever. At various times Kodis acted as Justin's private secretary. You've probably seen him—a Polish Jew, a small, red-haired man. It seems he had a long-standing account to settle with Justin. Years ago Justin played with the little Jewish girl to whom Kodis was engaged. Justin did her no harm, but the upshot of it all was that she threw Kodis over. She went to the bad, I believe, finally, and Kodis laid it to Justin's door." She drew an uneven breath. "Well, the man has watched and waited—he has his revenge now. He's told enough to frighten those people whose money Justin has played with, and they are demanding an investigation. . . . Then they'll prosecute."



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"Adele will prosecute?"

"I don't know what she will do; it's those others. I don't know that she knows yet that her money is gone."

Myra sat silent, thinking. The thing was a fact; it must be faced. . . . And if they dug back into the past this woman's history and her child's parentage would be exposed. Mrs. Swift had made no plea for herself, she had not put herself first, but Myra knew what she was fighting for, what she had always fought for—her child.

Mrs. Swift watched Myra intently, the intensity of hope that had brought her, and the almost certainty of failure alternately racking her. The muscles of her face twitched. She had been on the rack for days; self-control was deserting her. It made her voice falter.

"There will be only one solution—for Justin—"

Myra looked at her then, her wide, questioning look.

"The—short way—out—"

Myra sprang up. "Oh *no!* . . . Why, he wouldn't do *that!* . . . He mustn't give up like that! He must live to pay those people back! . . . The other way—that's too—*despicable!*"

"But how is he to go on?" Mrs. Swift asked, her hands clasping and unclasping as she looked up at Myra. "How?"

"I would help him do it."

"Oh, *would* you! Oh, Myra Milenberg, would you do it?" She had leapt to her feet, her strong hands gripping Myra's shoulders. "You can save him—you can save us all—you can hush up one of the worst scandals St. Louis has ever known! . . . You realize—I *know* you do; you have a level head. If your father dies you will be a very rich woman. You would not grudge enough to satisfy the claims of those people Justin has robbed? All they want is to know their money's safe. And if your father lives, you'll persuade him to help? . . . You would do it? You really mean it?"

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And Myra answered in much the same words her mother had used to her father. "Yes, I would. . . . I married Justin to be his *friend*. When I thought it was best to leave him, I begged him to be my friend. I couldn't be his enemy."

"There are not many—would do like—you—" Mrs. Swift said, brokenly. "You know—if you stood aside—as many would—it would be a short way out for you—also. . . . You'd be free, and your justification advertised everywhere. . . . That's been your father's plan—just to wait and let Justin hang himself. I knew that. I hadn't a bit of hope when I came to you. I walked the streets yesterday in despair. I came off here to New York, telling Justin that I meant to find help some way—from Hipbald or some one else—but that was more to keep Justin going than because I had any hope. Then, too, I couldn't risk being summoned. I knew too much. . . . I left Justin shut up in Woodmansie Place, like a rat in a huge gilded trap, afraid to put his head outside the door. If he got too desperate I knew what he'd do—" She shuddered.

"You mean he is alone—quite alone?" Myra interrupted. She was much the calmer of the two, and thinking clearly.

"With only the servants. One has to smile before one's servants—"

"But he—" Myra stopped. She could not tell this woman, who was on the verge of collapse, the fear that had gripped her. "Don't you see—the thing you must do first of all?" she said, swiftly. "Get word to Justin—as soon as you can—"

Mrs. Swift put her hands to her head. "Yes, yes, I know—a telegram—"

"No," Myra said, positively. "There's a quicker way. . . . Come in to my telephone. Get long distance. Tell him you have found help . . . that's the first thing to do."

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"Of course. I'd forgotten—I've been so beside myself—"

Myra left her seated at the telephone, waiting the answer to her call. She went out then to the kitchen to order food for her; Mrs. Swift looked as if she had not eaten or slept for days. . . . And it was best that those two should speak to each other without any one near to hear. . . . The answer to Mrs. Swift's call came presently; Myra heard the brief ringing of the bell, and then Mrs. Swift's voice.

When there was silence Myra returned. The room was very still, so still that the ticking of the clock was distinct. The telephone—greatest modern transmitter of joy and sorrow, of mad haste and leisurely converse, of righteous endeavor or sinful intent, stood with receiver dangling, and as soon as Myra saw Mrs. Swift's bowed head she knew. . . .

Justin St. Claire had chosen to send a marred soul into the Great Future.

But for those who were still grappling with life there was work to be done. . . . Myra came up softly and put her arm about the woman's quivering shoulders.



## CHAPTER XXXIX

SPRING had laid its garment of tender green upon Turawa Valley. The crowns of the conelike hills met the sky appealingly, their softened outlines melting into its blue, as if gently asking pardon for the long months of hard contact. The stretches of wheat-land smiled vividly up at the chasing clouds, sobering only when the clouds cast impatient shadows upon their smiles. The orchards bloomed riotously; New Rome nestled in pink and white and green, while the swollen river sucked mischievously at the roots of the overhanging willows. Nature was stirring like a healthily growing child, digging eager fingers into the black loam, smiling up at the sun, flaunting its bright garment in the breeze.

Myra looked out upon it all, understandingly. She had watched day by day from the arbor—into the early days of May. The terrace with its earth-scented beds of sprouting green was restful after the garish year-round display of the house above. She was its chatelaine, for as two years before they had brought her to the quiet of New Rome to regain her strength, just so they had brought her father. Her mother's time was given to her husband; Myra had taken upon herself the duties of the household.

She was thinking now that it would not be for long, for her father was steadily improving. He would never be the physically active man he had been; in the coming years New Rome would see far more of him than in the past; her mother would have her place at his side. But

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his keen brain was unimpaired. So long as he lived James Milenberg would rule his little world, and more kindly than in the past, Myra thought; he had consented to shoulder some of the responsibilities St. Claire had cast aside.

And when she was no longer needed she would go back to the life she had made for herself. Myra looked frequently at Rolling-Mill City. Its nakedness was unsoftened by spring's garment. Blackened, cinder-strewn, treeless, belching smoke and flame, it defied nature's blandishments. Its grim activity suggested the ceaseless roar of the great workshop to which she would soon be returning.

Myra was thinking somewhat vaguely; her real interest was elsewhere, for she was waiting, as she had waited for weeks, growing tense as the hour of mail-distribution approached. She knew that sooner or later must come the letter for which she waited, bearing the mark of some obscure corner of the world. He would not say much—some restrained expression showing that he had heard, and a few pages, probably, given to his travels. It would be like that; it could be no otherwise. Nevertheless, when the maid started down the terraces with the usual bit of white in her hand, Myra's breath came short.

When she took the bulky envelope the girl gave her, the superscription of which Myra saw even before it touched her hand, her eyes dilated. She felt cold, a little numb and stiff-lipped. How many, many such thick letters she had received! Recollection swept over and through her, and until her hands were steady enough to lift it she let the reminder of the past lie in her lap untouched. It was so difficult to disentangle the present from the past.

Myra opened it finally. She was too much shaken to notice that the letter was postmarked New York.

Alyth began tensely, breathlessly: "Myra, woman whom I love, the larger, finer half of me, I am coming to you.

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"I had thought until to-day that I must school myself to wait a little longer that I might work my way steadily up to you. But suddenly the way lies clear. The steamer brought me in this morning. At noon I saw my lawyer, and an hour later I talked with Mrs. Du Pont-Maurice. It was she who told me what had befallen you.

"I didn't know, dear. I knew nothing at all about it. I did not know that your father had been ill, I did not know that you were free. The night train will bring me to you. You will scarcely have put this down before I shall be with you. I write because I want you to know certain things that we need not discuss. When I come I want just one thing—my arms about you, and your 'yes' against my lips.

"You remember your ruling that we must part, your courage when my will was beginning to fail? It was when I said: 'You are right. For us it must be everything or nothing,' it was then that—in spite of my grief over my poor boy, my daze and misery, and the old demand that was rousing in me—it was then I began to plan. My reason had rejected what to us would have been the lesser thing, and your reason concurred with mine. That was decided between us, and we were in the right.

"But I could not sit down under that decision, make no struggle to win my mate, and in such manner that I could embrace her before the whole world. In the days of our forebears the decision to part and forever—unless death worked for us a miracle—would have been the only possible thing. It is not so in this day. We are questioning whether another order will not better conserve the race. That is the problem we are trying to solve. We want to cling to law and order; largely speaking, we must consider the masses and not the individual. But we are allowing the individual an opportunity to judge of his own case, and to act accordingly.

"There has never been a doubt in my mind that your



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union with St. Claire was a mistake; that children born to you would have been a mistake. He did not possess an atom of the paternal. I have always felt that you were right to leave him, and that the law should give you its sanction. You were meant for wifehood and motherhood in its completest and highest sense.

"With me there has been the question of my children. I have known for years that Caroline was no better fitted to be a mother than St. Claire was to be a father. But in my ignorance I had assumed a responsibility, and I must stand by it. There seemed no way for me but to keep the home as far as possible intact.

"But when I left you I was asking myself the question: what great end was I serving? I had found my mate. I was denying my manhood, and you your womanhood. There was in us the capacity for life-building at its best. The only restraining consideration was the welfare of the one child who was left me.

"I went to Jack the next day at his school. He is only eleven, but I meant to put the thing to him. He knows the meaning of divorce—what child does not, these days? We talked first of Dick, and I was glad to see the tears come in the boy's eyes; I had always thought of Jack as unfeeling. 'Dick was a nice little chap,' he said, with the brevity of any grown man. 'I've felt sorry.'

"He flushed with discomfort when I talked of the other thing. I shall never forget the look of my son as he sat on the edge of his chair and listened to me. Nevertheless, there was decision beneath his discomfort. He nodded as I went on. 'I know,' he said, 'it isn't much use when people don't get on any better than you and mother do.'

"But at my final question he stabbed me to the quick. He looked out at the grounds where the other boys were kicking a football about, and the truth came from him. 'Why do I have to live with either of you?' he asked.

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'Why can't I stay like I am—just at school till I'm grown up?'

"Myra, that answer hurt me almost as much as parting from Dick. I had failed in parenthood to both my children. But not altogether because of my own fault. God knows I have tried to do the best I knew for them. The fault lies in the sort of home Caroline and I made. What child could be expected to love it, or feel any great confidence in the parents who provide such a travesty? I talked to my boy as I never had before. In that hour Jack and I came nearer to each other than in all his eleven years. He has the making of a sturdy man in him, that boy of mine. I mean to stand by him.

"That interview with my son set the seal upon my determination. I would not be a modern man well acquainted with modern methods, and not after that have followed a definite plan. But I played fair. I went to Caroline and made my plea. She might make her own terms; all I asked was my share in Jack. She refused, and not because her reason did not approve the thing I urged. She refused me because of the hatred she feels for me. And a certain slyness that is part of Caroline advised her that I would submit.

"But she was wrong. I took the only course that would impress such a woman as Caroline. I left her house; I refused her support; I severed every connection; I flaunted my freedom; I deliberately tried to appear the sort of man I am not; I did it all with an utter disgust for the necessity. The laws of this state demand that there shall be at least the appearance of evil. Cecile Jerome helped me. I had once done her a kindness, helped one of her brothers to a position, and helped him to make good. It was an amusing play to her, our being seen together and commented on. We were simply for the time being friends. I never more than touched her hand. A man with the love in his heart that I have for you crave

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any other woman! That's an impossibility, and I knew that if ever talk came to you your big understanding nature would tell you that.

"But the whole procedure sickened me. Why do our courts continue to smugly grant divorces because of situations that are planned to deceive, or because of sins committed for a purpose? Why not be honest and concede that the discovery of a whole new set of demands in marriage has multiplied the causes for divorce? . . . I hate to tell you of those weeks; of my longing for you that again and again tempted me to come to you and beg for the lesser thing. I am not big-souled as you are, Myra. I not only craved you day and night, but I was tormented with jealousy. In spite of my reason, in spite of the love I knew you bore me, I was jealous. I was toiling along at a distance from you, and others could touch your hand. It was hateful, but it is best you should know the worst of me.

"And when I knew that I had succeeded, that Caroline would soothe the hurt to her pride by taking the tempting bait my lawyer in combination with hers had offered her—Manor Park Place and the third of my remaining fortune—still I dared not come to you. I would not be bringing you absolute certainty. And until I had my freedom I could not fight your battle for you—force St. Claire to free you—even then I dared not come to you.

"There was a space during which I must wait. To put temptation beyond me I went to Europe. Sickened as I was, I longed for the open, for the feel of rock, and the smell of damp earth. And curiously enough, the big silences brought me a certain peace. My torment and my disgust slipped from me. A more perfect love grew in me. . . . I came back to find that the power that gives no heed to man's small machinations had set you free.

"Myra, woman whom I love, be kind to me. I am bringing to you a cleaner and a finer love than I once



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offered you. And I believe that you also have grown into a larger understanding, for yours is a nature that will grow and grow. What do our small differences matter? Fundamentally we desire the same thing, the thing we desired as boy and girl: the lifelong union of one man with one woman—a home ministered to by both—and in that home to build life.

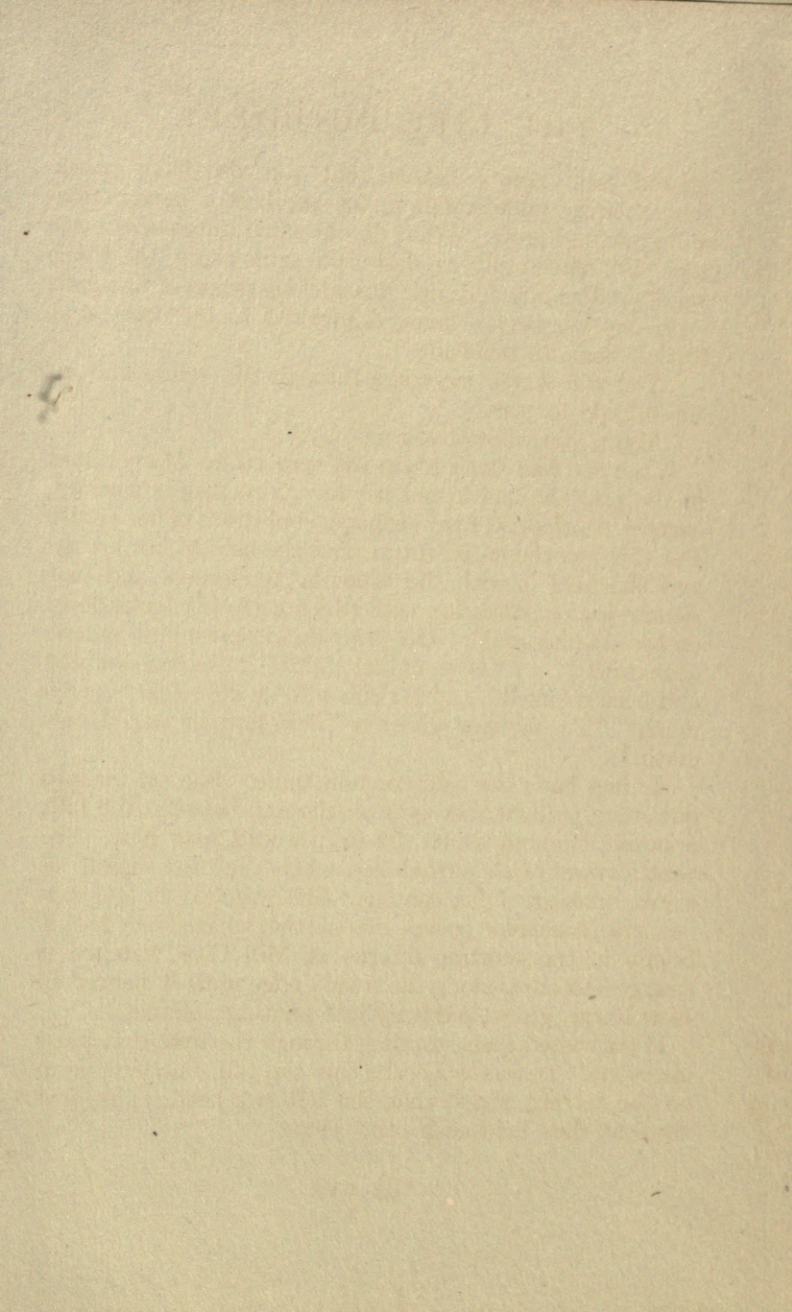
"You will watch me come through the valley and up the hillside to you.

"Myra, you will not say me nay."

When she had done Myra sat very still. Many times in the past she had kissed her lover's messages, warmly, eagerly, transports of her girlhood, ebullitions of her youth. But this was the entire future that she held to her breast, and she held it with the brooding tenderness and passionate joy of possession with which a mother looks down on her sleeping child. Hers was the deep-running reverie of maturity. . . . "O ye of little faith!" She had doubted and been rebuked. . . . "To him who loveth much is given much." To her was given a "new heaven and a new earth."

He had bade her wait for him there. She sat on into oncoming twilight, her eyes on the gap between the hills opposite, through which the train would bear him. She bent forward with parted lips when the first spiral of smoke announced his coming. She watched it lengthen out into snakelike curves across the wheat-land, lost it briefly in the snorting inferno of Mill City, watched it emerge and creep along the river's edge until it paused in New Rome, grown suddenly into panting volumes.

Myra waited then, standing through the time that must intervene. It was when she saw the tall, hurrying form on the terrace above that she left her post. The next moment they held each other close.



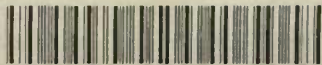
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